

NORTH KOREAN THEATER ■ GERSON'S GOSPEL ■ VALUES VOTERS SELL OUT

NOVEMBER 19, 2007

# The American Conservative

## HIRED GUNS

CONTRACTING OUT THE BUSINESS OF WAR



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## ATTACK BUSH, NOT HISTORY

Daniel Larison's piece on the alleged Armenian "genocide" was a huge disappointment to me (Nov. 5). I had come to expect a respect for historical exactitude from *The American Conservative*.

As Larison notes, the historical debate is complex, more so than he allows. Much of the standard account relies on the dubious testimony of Amb. Henry Morgenthau and the "elaborations" he encouraged from his Armenian amanuensis, Hagop Andonian, who was certainly not an unbiased observer. Morgenthau himself was an early edition of Paul Wolfowitz, a drum beater with a secret agenda, anxious to get U.S. troops into war. He was among the "malevolent persons" Kaiser Wilhelm II accused of being behind the concoctions concerning the Crown Council in Potsdam just prior to the outbreak of war.

Scholars will continue to debate the exact term for the horrible events of 1915-16, the pro-genocide "prominent historians" coming mostly from the Armenian diaspora. Bernard Lewis is not the only historian on the other side of the question—he is joined by the late Stanford J. Shaw, Pierre Oberling, Dankwart Rostow, Justin McCarthy, Norman Stone, Guenther Lewy, Heath Lowry, and Avigdor Levy. It is facile, if not dishonest, to dismiss all of these as "denialists."

Historical research is necessarily selective, but certain facts cannot be gainsaid. It is difficult to "pack" census data. When the claims of Armenian genocide first came to my attention in the 1960s, the figure routinely bandied about was 2.5 million dead. I was appropriately shocked.

The Ottomans, however, kept very good census data. According to the census of 1914, there were 1.3 million Armenians in the Empire. At least 100,000 in the western cities were unaffected by the troubles in the east.

Another 700,000 are known to have fled to the Caucasus, Western Europe, and the United States.

In his history of the Ottoman Empire, Shaw estimated that there were about 300,000 Armenian victims. He acknowledges that Armenian researchers claim higher census figures that, if true, could mean a toll of up to 1.3 million—a far cry from 2.5 million.

Shaw notes that there were approximately 6 million victims in this area during this period "killed by a combination of revolts, bandit attacks, massacres and counter massacres, and famine and disease, compounded by destructive and brutal foreign invasions in which all the people of the empire, Muslim and non-Muslim alike, had their victims and criminals." The Turks have long had their main archives open to researchers, and they have proposed an international commission of scholars to determine exactly what happened.

The folly of the Bush administration, Larison's main target, certainly deserves exposure, but *TAC* has made a bad bargain if it sacrifices its own credibility in the process.

FRANK CREEL  
*Arlington, Va.*

### ***Daniel Larison replies:***

I must respectfully disagree with Mr. Creel's letter. He has provided a list of both skeptical historians who dispute certain details and denialist historians who flatly reject the claim of genocide, including Professors Lewis, Shaw, and Shaw's students. If Shaw was not a genocide denier, no such person exists. The majority consensus of scholars accepts the designation of genocide in this case.

Mr. Creel also raises the problems posed in assessing the total number of Armenians slain, granting that the toll may have been as high as 1.3 million, which is not far removed from the frequently cited figure of 1.5 that I used in

my column. More fundamental to the question of whether there was a genocide beginning in 1915, however, is not the exact number of dead but rather the evidence of a state-run policy of deliberate mass murder of a particular group of people.

Tanker Akcam's *A Shameful Act* details the evidence of this policy at length, working from the records of Ottoman courts-martial, Ottoman archives, American, German, and Austrian consular reports, as well as the accounts of American missionaries serving in Anatolia. These records tell of the consequences of Talaat Pasha's stated desire for "a complete and fundamental elimination of this concern," that is, the Armenians. As Akcam has explained, using this wide array of sources that goes far beyond the allegedly doctored records of Ambassador Morgenthau, the genocide policy ignored those settlements in which Armenian population density did not exceed 10 percent of the population. He writes on page 178, "The issue was Armenian population density."

The genocide policy was an effort to reduce and limit the numerical strength of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, and this policy was implemented in both eastern and western Anatolia and in Thrace. Unfortunately, it was successful in its aims, such that Talaat could tell the German ambassador to the Porte by the end of August 1915, "The Armenian question no longer exists." It is an embarrassment to our country that any part of our government continues to act as if there is any question about the reality of the Armenian genocide.

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## [DIPLOMACY]

### TRAILING OUR COAT

In the hope that renewed threats will cause Tehran to abandon its nuclear-weapons ambitions, President Bush ordered the State and Treasury Departments to reclassify Iran's largest banks and affiliates of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps as supporters of terrorism and impose sanctions. The *Washington Post* called these "the most punitive measures imposed on Tehran since the 1979 takeover of the American Embassy." Condoleezza Rice warned that "Iran's rulers [who] choose to continue down a path of confrontation" will face "resistance" from the United States and its allies. According to the Bush administration, these punishments are the first steps toward peace.

Of course, the president's potential successors understand the logic of the sanctions. Mitt Romney, when asked what he would do if economic sanctions fail to warm relations, said he was open to "bombardment of some kind." Compassionate conservative Mike Huckabee explained, "Before we bomb them, we ought to try to bankrupt them." Making the administration's Orwellian logic explicit, he continued, "Iran is not a nation building up nuclear arms to defend against somebody, because there is no one threatening them." Clearly,

## [CULTURE]

### POLITICAL SCIENCE

We would be remiss if we didn't comment on the ritual humiliation of James Watson, who won a Nobel Prize in 1953, shared with two others, for discovering the structure of DNA, and has since been the guiding force behind one of America's most important scientific research libraries. The episode has been widely covered. At the end of a long interview in the *London Times* kicking off a lecture tour, Watson was asked a leading question and rather



than ducking, averred that he was "inherently gloomy about the prospect of Africa" because "all our social policies are based on the fact that their intelligence is the same as ours, whereas all the testing says not really."

A mass gang-up followed, as many competed to see who could most emphatically abhor the remark. First his prestigious lectures in London and Edinburgh were cancelled, then an "outraged" Federation of American Scientists issued a statement denouncing his "noxious" views, and finally Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory, which owes its eminence entirely to Watson's efforts, forced his resignation. Were public stoning legal in the West, that would have been the logical next step.

Americans have perfectly good moral and societal reasons not to dwell on the racial distribution of intelligence, and there is much wisdom in Nathan Glazer's comment in response to the publication of *The Bell Curve*. According to Bernstein and Murray, Glazer said, America "live[s] with an untruth. ... I ask myself whether the untruth is not better for American society than the truth."

But that doesn't justify the mob-like attacks that followed Watson's remark. If the old scientist's comments were so

obviously batty, they could have easily been ignored, discounted, or refuted. Scientists could point to Africa's record of development once freed from the shackles of colonialism or generate more nuanced arguments. The effort to block out and shout down goes entirely against the spirit of free inquiry, a great legacy of the modern West. If American science is now represented by those who would restart the Inquisition over a few comments in a newspaper interview, that is greater cause for worry than anything James Watson said.

## [CONGRESS]

### COUNTRY OVER PARTY

Congressman Walter Jones's courage may cost him his seat. Two years ago, the North Carolina conservative broke with the GOP establishment to oppose the indefinite occupation of Iraq. In July, he was one of only four House Republicans to vote for a troop-withdrawal bill. Now the six-term congressman faces his first primary challenge.

He won't go gentle. Jones, who still sits on the Armed Services Committee though his antiwar stand has cost him the leadership position his seniority deserves, knows the administration has Iran in its sites. His first blocking maneuver was a

January resolution to require Congressional approval for use of force. It fast became archive fodder. Undeterred, on Oct. 25, Jones introduced the Constitutional War Powers Resolution. It would "prohibit presidential entry into future hostilities without congressional action except: to repel and retaliate against an attack on the United States, repel an attack on U.S. troops, or protect and evacuate U.S. citizens." Sounds like the sort of thing any legislator who read the document he swore to defend would readily endorse. Not exactly. After Jones, just two of the House's 200 Republicans, Ron Paul and Wayne Gilchrest, have signed on. Anyone who thinks conservative principle yet trumps party diktat need look no further. The cult of loyalty maintains its grip.

But Jones remains his own man. He told the *LA Times*, "When my days end in Congress, I would rather be able to say I did what was right for America, rather than my party did this, my party did that."

#### [ELECTION]

### SIDESWIPING HILLARY

At the most recent Democratic primary debate, Connecticut Sen. Chris Dodd performed the most valuable service a no-hope candidate can: calling out the frontrunner. Asked about Gov. Elliot Spitzer's plan to give illegal aliens drivers licenses, Hillary Clinton said that the scheme "makes sense." The rest of the field nodded in agreement—except for Dodd.

"We need to deal with security on our borders, we need to deal with the attraction that draws people here, we need to deal fairly with those who are here; but this is a privilege ... and that ought not to be extended."

Clinton then said, "I did not say that it should be done, but I certainly recognize why Gov. Spitzer is trying to do it."

Correction. Dodd again: "Wait a

minute, you said, yes, you thought it made sense to do it."

Reeling, Hillary played the victim card: "You know, this is where everybody plays gotcha." Yes. It's called politics.

For the first time, Hillary no longer looked inevitable. The gap between the Democratic Party's elite multi-culti fantasies and grassroots desire for a secure border (and safe roads for that matter) is a gulf Clinton cannot bridge.

#### [GOP]

### DOVES NEED NOT APPLY

We've learned this firsthand: insufficient rhapsody about Ron Paul—even in favorable pieces—invites an avalanche of e-mail. The Bush babies at RedState got the treatment and answered with a ban: "If your account is less than 6 months old, you can talk about something else, you can participate in the other threads and be your zany libertarian self all you want, but you cannot pimp Ron Paul."

Unable to wrap their minds around the possibility that they had encountered a Republican they couldn't love, the RedStaters concluded that Paul can't possibly be one of them, thus his online evangelists are "a bunch of liberals pretending to be Republicans." Apparently it was unfathomable that the Right could produce a candidate who thinks war should be declared, government should be smaller, and the Constitution might be more than a museum piece.

A howl went up: RedStaters can't handle the truth. But the supreme confidence required to believe we're winning in Iraq isn't cowed by the keyboard stylings of Ron Paul's happy few. The cyber-cons don't fear losing; they consider the debate irrelevant. In today's GOP, such things are already settled—which is a far sadder thing than a band of cranky bloggers pulling up the ladder to their treehouse. ■

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# Hired Guns

While the volunteer Army struggles, the business of war booms.

By Kelley Beaucar Vlahos

THE ARMED security contractor in Iraq makes an appearance on the collective American radar only when events get so ugly they won't go away: the charred bodies of four Blackwater guards swinging from a Fallujah bridge in 2004, the 17 civilians reportedly killed by Blackwater men in a Baghdad square in September.

Mostly their presence—anywhere from 20,000- to 70,000-strong depending on who's counting—moves on a battlefield that, in the words of the 1980s television series "Tales of the Darkside," is "just as real, but not as brightly lit" as the news we see every night. They kill, bleed on the side of the road, and recover with stumps and prostheses, just not at Walter Reed Medical Center.

Richard Zbryski put the shadowy existence of the private parallel army in cold, hard perspective when he described how the body of his brother, Walter Zbryski, a 56-year-old retired New York City firefighter, was shipped home from his job as a contracted truck driver in Iraq. "What really upset me was that he was laying there floating in 6 inches of his own body fluids," still wearing his bloodied clothes, with half of his head blown away, Zbryski told the *Chicago Tribune*.

His brother was one of the more than 1,000 civilian contractors killed since the war began. More than 180,000 remain in Iraq today. Most are unarmed, doing everything from feeding and providing basic services to the U.S. military to constructing bases, transporting equipment, and rebuilding Iraqi infrastructure.

But it's the hired guns and spooks—the tens of thousands of guards protecting diplomats and VIPs, government buildings, reconstruction projects and convoys, plus prison interrogators—who bring into focus the fate of the mission and the implications of privatizing the military. They have people wondering what new breed of mercenary super-soldier American money is buying.

"There are many questions as to how a myriad of heavily armed private armies can serve the purpose of the US military and foreign policy," writes Robert Young Pelton, in *Licensed to Kill: Hired Guns in the War on Terror*.

Pelton has traveled with both military and private contractors in Afghanistan and Iraq throughout the conflict. He describes the new terrain shaped by outsourcing and reports that it bears little resemblance to the noble enterprise sold to the military years ago. Five years into operations, it is a darkly obscured landscape of violence, profiteering, and negligence. He senses that this parallel army is undermining the entire mission, leading to "blowback of extraordinary proportions."

"It strikes at the core of the entire American principle, the idea of the citizen soldier," he tells *TAC*. "We've been fighting this war longer than World War II, and the military is absolutely dependent on the private sector."

Never in modern history has war privatization reached this level. The course was set as early as the 1980s, when post-Cold War military restructuring led to

the first LOGCAP—the Army's Logistics Civil Augmentation Program—which furnished an open-ended, cost-plus contingency contract for private vendors to provide rapid support services to the Army in deployment operations. Military brass initially resisted the idea, write Dina Rasor and Robert Bauman in *Betraying Our Troops: The Destructive Results of Privatizing War*: "Military commanders, at the time, expressed considerable mistrust of a contractor's ability to supply troops on the battlefield because they would be too slow, unreliable, and uncontrollable."

But Dick Cheney, then defense secretary under President George H.W. Bush, was still able to secure a \$3.9 billion LOGCAP contract for Brown & Root before leaving office and becoming the CEO of its parent company, Halliburton, in 1995. Privatization expanded throughout the Clinton administration, with the new Kellogg, Brown & Root (KBR) and Dyncorp International receiving lucrative service contracts to work in Somalia, Rwanda, Southeast Asia, Kuwait, Haiti, and the former Yugoslavia.

Some say Cheney was the midwife of the military-private sector alliance. With Donald Rumsfeld, a kindred spirit who has also enjoyed a lucrative public-private revolving-door career, he was able to nurture that alliance into its current mutation in the global war on terror.

"[Privatization] became a mantra, that the contractors could do so much better," said Rasor, whose book is an exhaustive account of "what happens when you introduce a for-profit motive



into the battlefield.” Rumsfeld, who famously said “you go to war with the Army you have, not the one you want,” was “thinking like a businessman,” said Raser. “It’s not working out.”

After the Sept. 11 attacks, civilians—ex-soldiers and spies mostly—were unleashed on Afghanistan under the CIA to look for Osama bin Laden, according to Pelton, while Blackwater got its first gig guarding military facilities and, later, new Afghan President Hamid Karzai, who still enjoys the best security detail American money can buy.

As the war grew more dangerous, so did the need for armed contractors. Paul Bremer, head of the Coalition Provisional Authority until it turned over the keys to the Iraqis in 2004, introduced the first private security detail into Iraq, hiring Blackwater to the tune of \$21.3 million. In an astonishing display of firepower, Bremer was routinely surrounded by 36 civilian guards and “a fleet of SUVs, two bomb-sniffing canine teams with handlers, four pilots, four aerial gunners, a ground crew and three Boeing MD-530 ‘Little Bird’ helicopters,” Pelton reports. Later on, they would add three Mamba trucks with machine gun mounts and a Saracen armored carrier for transport.

Early news coverage of private contractors centered around the bravery of the truck drivers, servers, and technicians helping to rebuild Iraqi society and provide comforts never before experienced by American soldiers in the field. To many, even today, that remains true.

But the good news was soon tempered by reports that KBR, the biggest contractor in Iraq, was overcharging the military for things like fuel and food, engaging in fraud, and using the largely no-bid LOGCAP contract like a teenager with a credit card. Soldiers began to complain back home about work stoppages, wasted and lost equipment, and jobs that didn’t get done.

Worse than that emerging fiscal and logistical nightmare was the bad press generated by the guys with guns.

Outside of the tens of thousands of unarmed contractors on the ground, it is estimated that close to 200 security companies operate in Iraq today, ranging from the elite—Blackwater, Triple Canopy, and Dyncorp—to the low-paying and less impressively equipped “mom and pop” outfits. A minority are Americans and other Westerners. The rest are Iraqi and ex-military types from far-flung places like South Africa and Chile.

Billions of dollars in government and private money floating around have been a boon for the hired-gun business. But this might be one case in which the free market is not self-regulating. Unlike Main Street, the roiling pressures of danger and political instability in Baghdad won’t wait for this particular market to self-correct.

“Guys with guns and no laws governing them—it was inevitable in a way,” says Robert Greenwald, director of the documentary film “Iraq for Sale,” a gritty take on the business of war. He thinks the latest Blackwater scandal might be the “tipping point” for American patience with hiring war out to private guns who play by wildly different rules than U.S. soldiers.

“They have had an extraordinary track record of keeping people alive,” said (Ret.) Col. Gerald Schumacher, author of *A Bloody Business: Contractors and the Occupation of Iraq*. “They do it through intimidation. Bulldozing cars off the road. Varying degrees of aggressiveness.” Plus, “the contractor has surmised, and I think rightly so, that they are immune to prosecution.”

Iraqi anger at Blackwater is palpable. Local officials allege that contracted guards killed 17 civilians in the Sept. 16 shootout in Baghdad, including a child whose charred body was found fused to his mother’s in the backseat of a burning

car. Iraqis want the company tried in their courts and banned from their country, and it is not clear at this writing that Blackwater will survive the life of its \$571-million contract with the State Department.

In 2006, a drunken off-duty Blackwater guard was accused of murdering the bodyguard of Vice President Adil Abdul Mahdi on Christmas Eve in the Green Zone. He was shuttled out of the country before he could be questioned by Iraqi police and was fired but never prosecuted. The family of the bodyguard was given \$15,000 in compensation.

In 2005, an innocent bystander and father of six was fatally shot by Blackwater guards careening down a street in al-Hillah. Blackwater gave his family \$5,000 after the State Department urged the company to “put this unfortunate matter behind us quickly,” according to an e-mail supplied to the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee.

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has promised reforms, and on Oct. 25, Deputy Secretary for Diplomatic Security Richard Griffin tendered his resignation. Even Defense Secretary Robert Gates has said the contractors’ job to protect their clients is at “cross purposes to our larger mission in Iraq,” adding, “there have been instances where, to put it mildly, the Iraqis have been offended and not treated properly.” DoD employs about 7,300 security contractors in Iraq and 1,000 in Afghanistan; around 2,500 work for the State Department.

Blackwater insists that on Sept. 16 its guards were ambushed and were shooting in self-defense. Founder and CEO Erik Prince—the politically connected son of Edgar Prince, the late billionaire who helped build the Family Research Council—went on a media charm offensive in October, giving television interviews and inviting reporters to Blackwater’s 7,000-acre training facility in North Carolina.

"We don't get any advantages for the lack of accountability—we just end up getting hammered on the issue," said Doug Brooks, spokesman for the International Peace Operations Association, a trade group representing 40 companies in the private security industry. He and others say the assault on contractors is politically motivated and the stories of their abuses and excesses are greatly exaggerated.

But there is plenty of grist. Civilian interrogators were involved in the Abu Ghraib prison abuse scandal, and YouTube provides visuals of swaggering guards with heavy ammo, taking shots at unsuspecting Iraqis.

U.S. soldiers are the first to acknowledge that the "fog of war" sometimes invokes extraordinary measures, but the contractors' cocksure pose and seeming lack of conscience reflects on them all. "I feel that many of the contractors here have no respect for the locals and are doing a great deal of harm to our reputation," an Army lieutenant stationed in Afghanistan e-mailed.

"They don't have to explain themselves. We've all witnessed them shooting up cars, and then they just drive off in their SUVs, wearing their ballcaps, sunglasses, and full beards. If we shot up a car, we couldn't leave the scene for two days," said (Ret.) Marine Sgt. Nick Benas, who served in Iraq from July 2004 to March 2005. Afterward, he turned down an \$186,000 offer to train Iraqi police as a civilian contractor.

Advocates for contractors, like Jane Crowder, who started [www.AmericanContractorsinIraq.com](http://www.AmericanContractorsinIraq.com) as a support network for the community of civilian workers, say most contractors don't earn that much and are in many cases victims, too, fighting for medical benefits and lacking the institutional support military veterans take for granted. "Most of them get injured or killed before they make \$50,000, then they get sent home with no

medical coverage or follow-up care," she told the *Knoxville Voice* in June. "Once you leave Iraq, you're alone."

Danger, burnout, injury and death have led to significant turnover. The elite former Navy Seals and Army Special Forces who formed the backbone of the security enterprise in its early days are a vanishing breed, replaced by less qualified profit-seekers, Third World commandos, and "ham and eggheads" looking to reinvent themselves into something worthy of bravado back home.

Pelton suspects that some with the new "skill set" honed in Iraq may never want to go home and will continue looking for action and money elsewhere. "It's going to have a significant impact" on the global security landscape, he said. "I already see guys doing bounty hunting or getting involved in questionable training programs overseas." If the military ever wanted to go all the way and start hiring mercenaries to do their fighting, there's probably a division ready to go.

The temptation is understandable, for it avoids the politically difficult decision to put more boots on the ground, calling up more National Guard and reserves, or appealing to the United Nations and NATO for help. "It is a predicament of [the U.S. government's] own making. It has over-outsourced to the point that it is unable to imagine carrying out its most basic operations without them," war privatization expert Peter W. Singer suggests in *Can't Win with 'Em, Can't Go to War without 'Em: Private Military Contractors and Counterinsurgency*.

He goes on: "The use of private military contractors appears to have harmed, rather than helped the counterinsurgency efforts of the U.S. mission in Iraq," which require winning over the local population. He hopes the military will take a long look at whether it can continue. "Will our leaders have the will to just say no?"

Dina Rasor considers that unlikely simply because there are so many lobby-

ists on Capitol Hill pushing the magic pill of privatization, and big firms always have influential ex-military and CIA on the payroll. Blackwater Vice Chairman Cofer Black led CIA operations in Afghanistan and is now serving as an adviser to GOP presidential candidate Mitt Romney.

After the 2004 incident in which four Blackwater guards were shot and hung from the bridge in Fallujah—a case in which the company is facing lawsuits from the victims' families for allegedly sending them out on a mission unprepared—Prince hired now-defunct Republican lobbying firm Alexander Strategy Group, tied to then-Majority Leader Tom DeLay and convicted lobbyist Jack Abramoff. According to Rasor, "Blackwater's investment in Alexander paid off quickly. By mid-November 2004, Blackwater reported a 600 percent growth in additional contract dollars." And the windfall isn't limited to Mideast operations: after Hurricane Katrina, Blackwater guards patrolled the streets of New Orleans under a new domestic contract.

Blackwater has received \$1 billion from the U.S. government since the start of the war. Erik Prince won't disclose Blackwater's profit margin, but he recently told Congress he made around \$1 million last year.

"This new [war service] industry depends on hot wars, occupations and natural disasters (which can't always be counted on), to keep it going," Rasor writes. But Prince won't surrender to the cynicism, at least in public, calling most contractors "open, honest Americans trying to do a good job," in an October *Washington Post* interview. Then, according to the *Post*, came the rub: "If they don't like what we're doing," he declared, snapping his fingers, "then cut off the revenue stream right now." ■

*Kelley Beaucar Vlahos is a Washington, D.C.-based freelance reporter.*



# Warmed-Over Globalism

The scaremongers are not always wrong. The Trojans should have listened to Cassandra. But history shows that the scaremongers are usually wrong.

Parson Malthus predicted mass starvation 250 years ago, as the population was growing geometrically, doubling each generation, while agricultural production was going arithmetically, by 2 percent or so a year. But today, with perhaps 1 percent of our population in full-time food production, we are the best-fed and fattest 300 million people on Earth.

Karl Marx was proven dead wrong about the immiseration of the masses under capitalism and the coming revolution in the industrial West, though they still have hopes at Harvard.

Nevil Shute's *On the Beach* proved as fictional as "Dr. Strangelove" and "Seven Days in May." Paul Ehrlich's *Population Bomb* never exploded. It fizzled when the Birth Dearth followed the Baby Boom.

The Crash of '79 never happened. Instead, we got Ronald Reagan and record prosperity. The Club of Rome notwithstanding, we did not run out of oil. The world did not end in Y2K, when we crossed the millennium, as some had prophesied. Nuclear winter, where we were all going to freeze to death after the soot from Reagan's nuclear war blotted out the sun, didn't quite happen. Rather, the Soviet Empire gave up the ghost.

Is then global warming—a steady rise in the temperature of the Earth to where the polar ice caps melt, oceans rise 23 feet, cities sink into the sea and horrendous hurricanes devastate the land—an imminent and mortal danger? Put me down as a disbeliever.

Like the panics of bygone eras, this one has the aspect of yet another reenactment of the Big Con. The huckster

arrives in town, tells all the rubes that disaster impends for them and their families, but says there may be one last chance they can be saved. But it will take a lot of money. And the folks should go about collecting it, right now.

This, it seems to me, is what the global-warming scare and scam are all about—frightening Americans into transferring sovereignty, power, and wealth to a global political elite that claims it alone understands the crisis and it alone can save us from impending disaster.

Under the Kyoto Protocol, from which China and India were exempt, the United States was to reduce carbon emissions to 1990 levels, which could not be done without inducing a new Depression and reducing the standard of living of the American people. So, we ignored Kyoto—and how have we suffered? The Europeans who signed on also largely ignored it. How have they suffered?

We are told global warming was responsible for the hurricane summer of Katrina and Rita that devastated Texas, Mississippi, and Louisiana. Yet Dr. William Gray, perhaps the nation's foremost expert on hurricanes, says he and his most experienced colleagues believe humans have little impact on global warming and it cannot explain the frequency or ferocity of hurricanes. After all, we had more hurricanes in the first half of the 20th century than in the last 50 years, as global warming was taking place.

"We're brainwashing our children," says Gray. "They're going to the Gore movie and being fed all this. It's ridiculous. ... We'll look back on all of this in 10

or 15 years and realize how foolish it was." He does concede that a scholar who questions global warming may put his next federal grant in mortal peril.

While modest warming has taken place, there is no conclusive evidence humans are responsible, no conclusive evidence Earth's temperature is rising dangerously or will reach intolerable levels, and no conclusive evidence that warming will do more harm than good.

The glaciers may be receding, but the polar bear population is growing, alarmingly in some Canadian Indian villages. Though more people on our planet of 6 billion may die of heat, estimates are that many more may be spared death from the cold. The Arctic ice cap may be shrinking, but that may mean year-round passage through northern Canadian waters from the Atlantic to the Pacific and the immense resources of the Arctic made more accessible to man. Why else did Vladimir Putin's boys make their dash to claim the pole?

The mammoth government we have today is a result of politicians rushing to solve "crises" by creating and empowering new federal agencies. Whether it's hunger, poverty or homelessness, in the end, the poor are always with us, but now we have something else always with us: scores of thousands of federal bureaucrats and armies of academics to study the problem and assess the progress, with all their pay and benefits provided by our tax dollars.

Cal Coolidge said that when you see 10 troubles coming up the road toward you, sometimes the best thing to do is nothing, because nine of them will fall into the ditch before they get to you. And so it will be with global warming if we don't sell out America to the hucksters who would save us. ■

# Prisoners in Camp Kim

Strange, secretive, and desperately poor, North Korea tests the limits of social control.

**By Peter Hitchens**

PYONGYANG—Here is the locked ward of the political asylum, the place where politics has actually become an official state religion, and power is worshipped, directly and literally, in the form of a colossal bronze idol to which the people come and bow with every sign of reverence. Nothing in the modern world compares with North Korea, though it gives us some clue about how life must have been under the pharaohs, in Imperial Japan before Hiroshima, or in the obliterated years—conveniently erased from memory by blushing fellow travelers—when Josef Stalin was revered as a human god.

Pyongyang is the most carefully planned and also the most mysterious city on the planet. You cannot, unless you escape from the warders who accompany foreigners everywhere in North Korea, walk inquisitively along its surprisingly green and spacious streets. If you did, you would rapidly be apprehended and returned, amid fierce reprimands, to your tour bus or to the special hotel on an island in the Taedong River, where outsiders are comfortably but irksomely confined when they are not on supervised expeditions. But you can glimpse the shady, fenced-off streets where the elite live, close to the Russian Embassy from which subsidies used to pour in Soviet days.

You can gaze on the gargantuan housing estates, made up of scores of apartment blocks, a great festival of concrete outdoing even Soviet Moscow in its

gigantism. You may admire the Juche Tower, which symbolizes North Korea's supposed self-reliance. The tower is a column three feet taller than the Washington Monument, weirdly topped by a great simulated red flame, like a much larger version of the World War I Memorial in Kansas City, but only when there is enough power to keep it aglow. That is not always. Voltage is a problem in Pyongyang. The streetlamps are never switched on, and there is a strange interval between sundown and total darkness, before the lights start to come on in the windows of all the apartments. There is also a wonderful quiet, since Pyongyang has hardly any motor traffic by day and even less at night. Human voices can be heard from astonishing distances, as if you were in a tranquil lakeside resort rather than in the center of a grandiose metropolis. The electric current in homes and offices seems suspiciously feeble and shuts down abruptly when the government thinks bedtime has arrived. The authorities also have views on when you ought to wake up. A siren rouses the sluggards at 7 each morning, though light sleepers will already have been alerted to the approach of the working day by ghostly plinking, plonking music drifting from loudspeakers at 5 and 6 o'clock. The sensation of living in an enormous institution, part boarding school, part concentration camp, is greatly enhanced by the sound of these mass alarms.

I wondered what they reminded me of until it came to me that they resembled the Muslim call to prayer, wavering and throbbing across Islamic cities for the pre-dawn prayers. For while visitors may see this place as a prison, many of its inmates show every sign of regarding it as a shrine to the human god whose image they all wear on their clothes and whose various names cannot be pronounced without reverence: the Great Leader, Gen. Kim Il Sung. It is Kim, not Marx or Lenin, who is honored everywhere. In fact, the Communist nature of the regime is hardly ever stated, except in the hammer, sickle, and writing brush of the Korean Workers' Party symbol.

If you are very lucky and honored, you may penetrate the Kumsusan Memorial Palace. This was the home of the Great Leader when he was ordinarily alive, kept going in his later years by a special diet of extra-long dog penises. Today, it is his mausoleum, where he lives forever in the extraordinary fashion devised for him by whoever actually controls this country. This is no mere Lenin's Tomb but a temple of awe, where devotees must have the dust blasted from their clothes and shoes before approaching the sacred body and bowing deeply.

I was not considered worthy to go there, but was allowed to lay flowers at, and bow to, the bronze image of Kim that gleams on a hill above the city—and used to gleam a great deal more before the gold leaf that once adorned it was

stripped off. It is widely believed that the extravagant coating was removed in one night after the Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping remarked dryly that if North Korea could afford such a display, it surely did not really need the Chinese economic aid for which it was asking. As for the bow, I performed a perfunctory Episcopalian nod, inoffensive, polite, but far from effusive. One of the many advantages of an Anglican upbringing is that one has gestures for all occasions, including obeisance to the bronze images of unhinged tyrants—though I found myself strangely disturbed by and ashamed of this particular breach of the Commandments for some time afterward. As I laid the equally obligatory and hideous flowers, I silently assured myself that I was doing so in memory of Kim's many victims. You may classify this as cowardice, and I will not necessarily disagree, but it seemed that I had accepted that I would have to kowtow to this cult the moment I decided to enter North Korea. What is more, I sensed that my guides and guards genuinely revered this thing and that it would be plain bad manners to refuse.

Brooding over this morbid, idolatrous cityscape is a great pyramid, a thousand feet high. But this majestic structure is also a ruin, a grand project that was never finished and now never will be. Visitors are discouraged from asking about it. Guides prefer not to mention it, and more recent official publications do not contain pictures of it, though older ones do. It's by far the tallest tower in Pyongyang, but its windows show no lamps by night, and it has no aircraft warning lights (a lower skyscraper does), so that if there ever were any air traffic over Pyongyang (there isn't), it would pose a grave danger to night-flyers. It is, by coincidence, almost exactly the height and shape of the Ministry of Truth in George Orwell's *1984*,

though its purpose was more innocent—it was to be a hotel, taller than any other in the region. But something mysterious went wrong with the construction, and so it slowly crumbles, mocking with its hundreds of glassless windows the tongue that commanded its construction and the mind that conceived it. Nothing short of a nuclear explosion could remove it, but it is hard to believe that a nation that cannot even finish a grand hotel can really construct a workable atom bomb, as it claims to have done.

The main feeling the visitor has in Pyongyang is one of pity at the pathos of the place—its hopeless, helpless overestimate of its own power and importance, the deluded ignorance of millions of people carefully protected from any inrush of truth about themselves, their country, and their rulers. Every radio and TV set has been carefully neutered, its

havior of any kind could lead to exile to places we cannot even imagine. I have seen the miserable coal towns of China, which are open to visitors and have at least been touched by the prosperity flowing through the People's Republic. They look like 19th-century pit villages in Britain. But even I cannot conceive of the dreariness and overpowering gloom of their North Korean equivalents, hidden away in the northern mountains, which no Westerner ever sees.

As for the chain of concentration camps, to which three generations of offending families are dispatched, it is more or less impossible to remain comfortable in our homes while we know that these zones of deliberate inhumanity and intentional despair exist as we live our happy lives. To make life bearable, we force ourselves to forget. But they do exist and are likely to continue to do so for some time to come.

THE MAIN FEELING THE VISITOR HAS IN PYONGYANG IS ONE OF **PITY AT THE PATHOS OF THE PLACE—ITS HOPELESS, HELPLESS OVERESTIMATE OF ITS OWN POWER AND IMPORTANCE.**

tuning dial soldered so that it can receive only the transmissions of the North Korean state. There is no access to the Internet except for a tiny, select few. Cell phones are confiscated from visitors upon arrival, though the very senior elite are believed to possess and use them. The newspapers are comically constipated accounts of speeches by the Dear Leader, long-ago angling contests, and uninteresting visits by junior dignitaries from countries ruled by dubious governments, which you would struggle to find on a map.

It may well be even worse than it looks. Pyongyang is a show city, inhabited by a favored layer of privileged and chosen people, who know that misbe-

I can only tell of what I saw, though for a moment here I should like to quote from Bradley Martin's indispensable book about North Korea, *Under the Loving Care of the Fatherly Leader*. On a visit in 1992, Martin was taken on an obviously staged tour of the country, on a special train that did not halt in towns or cities, its Western passengers stopped by armed guards from exploring on their own. Then, peering out of the window, he saw "a trainload of North Koreans passing us in the opposite direction. They were a ghastly sight. Their clothing was ragged and filthy, their faces darkened with what I presumed to be either mud or skin discolorations resulting from pel-



lagra. There was no glass in the windows of their train. At that moment I figured I must have glimpsed accidentally what it was the authorities with their elaborate scheduling and preparations tried so hard to prevent visitors from seeing.”

And they do try. My group was mostly made up of journalists posing so unconvincingly as tourists that I am sure someone in the state apparatus knew perfectly well what we were up to. For me, the main restraint on slipping my leash was that if I did, I would bring trouble on my guards and on my fellow journalists. I considered a break-away. I had brought a flashlight to cope with the unlit streets and uncovered manholes of Pyongyang. I had excellent and detailed maps of the city. By careful observation and subtle questioning of our custodians, I had discovered how to buy and use a ticket on the Pyongyang subway, about which I had become a theoretical expert after much diligent study. I had even obtained what I think was North Korean money—though it is rumored that there are at least three currencies, only one of them actually used by normal citizens, which beats Cuba’s mere two. My escape was intended to take place at the Arirang Games, a monstrous celebration of synchronized, disciplined Kim-worship, in which thousands of schoolchildren make elaborate giant pictures of stirring scenes by holding up placards in unison, and regiments of dancers and soldiers parade and twirl in devotional ballets about the Great Leader and the might of the Democratic People’s Republic, as an enormous cardboard sun rises over the stadium. (“Kim Il Sung” can be translated “becoming the sun.”) Full use is made of attractive young women in sharply tailored military uniforms, a strange speciality of North Korean propaganda that perhaps has something to do with the Happy

Corps and the Satisfaction Corps, units of pretty girls allegedly recruited to serve the baser wants of the Dear and Great Leaders. It is both grotesque and captivating, and the flesh crawls at the thought of how the participants are trained to perform these feats. Sadly for my escape scheme, the audience

alarmed and moved between me and the door to make sure I couldn’t approach any closer.

Later on the trip, we arrived at a restaurant that had—as usual—been cleared of everyone else for our visit. As we clambered out of our minibus, my eye was drawn to a picturesque

**IT IS ASTONISHING HOW MUCH IS SECRET. COULD WE VISIT PYONGYANG’S BOWLING ALLEY, AN ESTABLISHMENT WHOSE VERY EXISTENCE WAS SO UNLIKELY THAT IT WAS BOUND TO BE INTERESTING? NO. COULD WE VISIT THE RAILWAY STATION? NO.**

that night was considerably smaller than the cast, and the swirling crowds in which I had hoped to be “accidentally” separated from my escorts were far too thin to do this convincingly—especially since they seemed to have guessed my purpose and were keeping a close watch.

What might I have seen if I had escaped? My guess is that, in the brief period before I was detected and returned to my guardians—for a Westerner in North Korea is as startling a sight as a giraffe at the North Pole and is likely to be reported immediately as a spy—I would have discovered quite a lot of drunkenness, which, to be fair, is a problem in South Korea as well. On one privileged occasion, I managed to persuade one of the guides to accompany me for a walk along a main street in the suburbs. He forbade me to go into any of the shops, which sold bizarre combinations of goods—motorbikes, furniture, breakfast cereal, and instant coffee being on display in one. We came across a surprisingly ordinary Asian scene, of wrinkled, grizzled men in shabby work clothes squatting on the sidewalk round a game of cards. And then we came to a bar. My companion had been anxious up to this point, but now he became positively

group of children all staring through some railings. Then I saw what they were staring at: a man, prone on the scrubby grass, possibly dead, more likely dead drunk. I couldn’t stop myself from asking our minders, “Why is that man lying on the ground?” though I knew it was a silly question, that they were not going to answer it, and that it was bad form on my part to have noticed the tableau at all. But I received an answer anyway. Whatever he was doing there, he wasn’t supposed to be doing it, and I wasn’t supposed to see it. Within 30 seconds, a group of nearby citizens had formed a human screen, loyally shielding the sight from us. The fate of the horizontal man himself, like so much else in North Korea, will remain forever unknown.

It is astonishing how much is secret. Could we visit Pyongyang’s bowling alley, an establishment whose very existence was so unlikely that it was bound to be interesting? No. Could we visit the railway station? No. Could we travel more than one stop on the much trumpeted subway, wrongly claimed to be grander than the one in Moscow? No.

Our visit to the subway was at least more open than those provided for some past visitors, who recorded that all the other passengers were mysteri-

ously well-dressed and formed the impression that an entire section of the line had been cleared of citizens and populated instead with actors, purely for their benefit. We were shepherded down the escalators among real people, though some of them were singing a song in praise of the Dear Leader, and were then required to wait till a carriage was emptied for our use. Normal people, insofar as there are any such creatures in North Korea, surged past on the platform, staring with suspicion and wonder at the imperialist spies and Yankee wolves in human form but keeping a safe distance. After one stop and a glimpse of the tasteless decorations, mixing Stalinist ponderousness with a sort of kitschy, plastic levity, we were urged off the train and up into the outside world again.

Taking cruel advantage of what I assumed was the naïveté of our guide, I offered to buy her an ice cream from a stall at the top of the stairs, using my

during Chuseok, an ancient festival something like our All Hallows, in which ancestors are revered, special feasts are consumed (including a cake in the shape of the crescent moon), and graves visited. It was the first time I had seen anything wholly genuine and spontaneous here. As we drove out of Pyongyang, we passed crammed buses and bicycles bearing entire families (father pedaling, mother perched behind, tiny child in the basket) heading for the countryside in a great surge of voluntary movement. Once out of the city—which, being comprehensively planned and controlled, ends abruptly without suburban sprawl—it was possible to see the people, brightly dressed for the holiday, picnicking among the hilltop graves of their forebears. I can only imagine that ancestor worship is tolerated both because it would be very hard to prohibit and because it chimes with the cult of the deceased Great Leader.

IN THE EARLY FALL LIGHT, ITS **LANDSCAPES ARE PARTICULARLY POIGNANT**, WITH THE **WILLOW-FRINGED RICE FIELDS** AND PEASANTS IN THEIR FADED GARMENTS AND WITH THEIR TIMELESS, HOLLOW FACES, **CARRYING SHEAVES HOMEWARD**.

North Korean coin. She declined but obviously felt she had lost face. So taking even more advantage, I asked her to translate for me at a small snack bar, where I asked the prices of various sandwiches and drinks on display. She was about to tell me when both her senior colleagues converged on us, wearing forbidding expressions and ordering her urgently to stop. The price of a cheese sandwich in Pyongyang remains secret, as the authorities wish it to be.

More unintentional revelations came my way during our journeys out of Pyongyang. One of these took place

And I must mention here something rather unexpected: much of North Korea is very lovely and unspoiled. In the early fall light, its landscapes are particularly poignant, with the willow-fringed rice fields and peasants in their faded garments and with their timeless, hollow faces, carrying sheaves homeward. Men in straw hats fish patiently by the rivers and canals. Others, bearing hoes or shovels, trudge by the roadside. These vistas look very much like the sepia illustrations of Asian life in the outdated imperial encyclopaedias with which I spent many a rapt, fireside afternoon in my distant childhood.

The main roads themselves, which are often used by foreigners, are probably deeply misleading, since the authorities will have carefully cleared away anything embarrassing or ugly. But someone in some bureaucratic department has struck a quiet blow for unregulated beauty. The verges of the major highways are planted with millions of fall flowers, not in ordered parades but in a natural-seeming chaos that entirely contradicts the spirit of the state.

Other things are also unintentionally revealed even in this regimented and stage-managed place. I am prepared to believe that North Korea has a nuclear weapon, though I think the evidence is inconclusive and the country certainly does not possess an accurate, reliable rocket with which to deliver such a warhead. But its military power in general is decrepit. I saw many soldiers, though we were forbidden to photograph them. I suspect this is because they are undersized, shabbily dressed, and their weapons are ancient and probably useless. One infantryman, who halted us at a checkpoint on the way to the frontier, carried a rifle whose unvarnished wooden stock was split. The metal parts were worn and old. I should not have wanted to fire such a gun, for fear that it would blow up in my face, and I doubt if it had been used for many years.

The general state of the country is similarly impoverished and worn out. On a compulsory trip to a museum containing foreign gifts to the Dear and Great Leaders, our minibus broke down. The cause was a leaking fuel tank, which the driver tried to repair with a blob of chewing gum before driving at flank speed in the hope of reaching our destination before we ran out of gas. But we didn't make it. Our chief guide first tried to get help by flagging down a black SUV probably belonging to a senior party official. The SUV almost ran him over, and its occupant refused to

help. Then our supervisor borrowed a bicycle, returning at length with another bus, which shortly afterward broke down, fortunately within sight of a foreigners hotel where we could be kept until rescued. All this involved equipment and places specifically prepared and reserved for foreigners and paid for with real hard currency. Even on the routes permitted to us, I saw hardly any tractors working in the fields. The few trains I observed were moving very slowly and—though the lines were electrified—were hauled by diesel locomotives, suggesting that the power was not flowing. One morning we were delayed past our usual strict departure time at our Pyongyang hotel, and the electricity was suddenly switched off, presumably until our equally predictable return.

ONE MORNING **WE WERE DELAYED** PAST OUR USUAL STRICT DEPARTURE TIME AT OUR PYONGYANG HOTEL, AND **THE ELECTRICITY WAS SUDDENLY SWITCHED OFF**, PRESUMABLY UNTIL OUR EQUALLY **PREDICTABLE RETURN**.

North Korea is so insolvent that it cannot even afford to be bankrupt. Since the Cold War ended, the Soviet subsidies that kept it alive have vanished. Raúl Castro's Cuba looks like an economic miracle compared with this. The country has no source of energy apart from its coalmines, and it is hard to believe that these are efficiently worked or that the power stations they serve are in good order. The pitiful state of the infrastructure has been revealed in the recent talks on the decommissioning of the Yongbyong nuclear facility, during which Pyongyang has been almost hysterically insistent on promised deliveries of fuel oil and on the unfreezing of mysterious bank accounts in Macau, probably used by the elite to purchase luxuries for themselves.

It is impossible to say if there is still actual famine. Even the privileged inhabitants of Pyongyang are invariably slender and hollow-cheeked, though it is believed that the elite reserves most foreign food aid for itself and its loyal servants. Several Western charities have withdrawn from the country because they had no control over how their aid was distributed and feared they were being used to shore up an unequal and rotten system. The only evidence that things may be improving is that the food offered to us as outsiders was relatively plentiful. Earlier visitors have recounted how even they, in possession of hard currency, were left hungry.

I would not ask anyone to draw strategic conclusions from any of this. I saw mainly what I was supposed to see.

In theory, even the failures could have been part of an elaborate deception, though I do not think so. North Korea has been convincingly accused of involvement in illegal drug running, of counterfeiting dollars, and of money laundering. These are the actions of a pariah state but also of one that is desperate, resorting to extortion because it has no other way of surviving but dares not dissolve itself.

Long nurtured hopes of reunification with the South have evaporated since the rejoining of East and West Germany turned out to be so difficult and expensive, and the economic chasm between the two Germanies was nothing compared to the gulf between the two Koreas. One is a surging 21st-century industrial power; the other is

forcibly detained in the early 1950s, in the Concrete Age of Soviet Planning, long abandoned even in the country that gave it birth. If the border were opened overnight and the truth revealed, as many as 23 million refugees would probably head south as fast as they could—with incalculable consequences.

And then there is the general problem with despots, created by our pious insistence on frogmarching them, in chains, in front of righteous tribunals. What tyrant, seeing the imprisonment of Milosevic, the hanging of Saddam, and the harassment of Pinochet and Honecker, would be stupid enough to abandon his sovereign immunity and volunteer for the cells? And there is another danger: who, aware of the shooting of Nicolae and Elena Ceausescu, would relax his repressive machine for a second or show any sign of weakness. As it is, Kim Jong Il, now 65 and in poor health, has no incentive to dismantle his kingdom of lies and repression, though it is hard to see how it could survive his death for long.

North Korea is a small, isolated, stagnant pond left over from the flood of Marxism-Leninism, which long ago receded. But it has nowhere to drain away. Far too many people, not all of them in Pyongyang, have an interest in keeping it as it is. It still has the capacity to do terrible things but mainly to its own citizens. A serious policy would aim to find a way to help it escape from the political and economic trap in which it finds itself. Threats, name-calling, and the pretence that this shambles of a country is a serious world power are unlikely to achieve this. It is more to be pitied than to be feared. ■

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# Term Limits

During the week of Oct. 22-26, David Horowitz and an alliance of conservative organizations sponsored a series of lectures and protests at universities around

the United States to draw attention to “Islamofascism.” Just in time for this “Islamofascism Awareness Week,” Christopher Hitchens penned a defense of the term. This is ironic, given Hitchens’s stated admiration for George Orwell, who said in his 1946 essay “Politics and the English Language” that fascism “has now no meaning except in so far as it signifies ‘something not desirable.’”

The word “Islamofascism” never had any meaning, except as a catch-all for whatever regimes and groups the word’s users wished to make targets for military action. Hitchens is also well known for his tendentious misunderstandings of all forms of religion, likening theism to a supernatural totalitarian regime and attributing all of the crimes of political totalitarianism to religion. It was therefore appropriate that he should promote the term “Islamofascism” since it defines a religious movement in the language of secular totalitarianism.

The key problem with the label is its stunning ignorance of both fascism and jihadism. Fascism was a specific, secular, modernizing ideology—what historian Stanley Payne has called “revolutionary hyper-nationalism”—that emerged out of Europe’s ruins in WWI. It was focused above all on exalting the nation. Search in vain for any resemblance to a transnational, religious movement that claims to seek the restoration of a theocratic state. In art and architecture, fascists were champions of modernism; jihadists clearly have no such interests. The valorization of war and death that Hitchens cites in his

defense as proof of the similarity between the two is common to all armed revolutionary movements.

In addition to its rhetorical and historical errors, the designation reveals interventionists’ monomania about the lessons of WWII. Every threat must be likened to Nazism as much as possible, and every crisis must be another Munich 1938. Historical myopia of this sort leads to strategic blindness, as the endless use of WWII analogies to rationalize the Iraq War has abundantly shown.

Like the pejorative term from which it derives, Islamofascism means whatever the person deploying it wants it to mean. It is ultimately not an attempt at description or explanation but a demon word designed to generate visceral, irrational reaction. This is precisely the opposite of the careful, deliberate, and informed responses we need to cultivate. And since it obscures the actual nature of jihadism, it is not simply a crime against the English language but a dangerous source of misunderstanding.

As Marxists once used the term “fascist” to vilify everyone to their right as a means of wielding influence, Horowitz and his allies use “Islamofascist” to group together the many regimes and groups they wish to cast as a cohesive, united enemy, conflating mutually hostile forces into a single, undifferentiated mass.

The campus protests against Islamofascism Awareness Week have been no less absurd, with critics flinging charges of racism and “Islamophobia.” As intellectually vacuous moral bludgeons go, Islamophobia is almost in a class by

itself. Those deploying the term try to make any attempt to criticize any aspect of Islam taboo. Like Islamofascism, the charge is meant to confuse listeners, chastise opponents, and end discussion.

“Islamophobia” is a word favored by both jihadist apologists and the conventional enforcers of “tolerance” and opponents of “hate speech.” Attributing acts of violence to Islam, criticizing practices in Islamic countries, or even associating the name of Islam with crimes carried out in its name draw the charge. It, like other thought-policing labels, is a tool for defining the limits of speech and shutting down critical thinking while securing select groups from reasonable inquiry and political opposition. The term implies irrational fear and loathing and classes an entire perspective as nothing more than hatred, denying to critics of jihadism their rationality and so denigrating them as being less than fully human. Control of debate, indeed, control over whether there will even be a debate, is the goal.

The proper use of names and words is essential to rational argument, and the proliferation of nonsense terms and thought-policing labels is fatal. Use of propagandistic terms like “Islamofascism” and “Islamophobia” is an attempt to wield power through confusion and intimidation: they aim to mislead about the nature of our actual enemies on the one hand and invent new heresies against “tolerance” on the other. The debasement and cheapening of language are assaults on the quality of thought and discourse, and they are intended to prevent the proper, sober understanding of the realities of the Islamic world and our policies overseas. ■

# Osama's Man in America

His job: keep the Viagra and the gossip flowing while praying for a Giuliani victory.

By Leon Hadar

*The following document was obtained by a small private intelligence company, located at a (secret) address in Chevy Chase, Maryland, that monitors Islamic terrorist groups. It followed a year-long surveillance operation that intercepted (secret) messages within a (secret) al-Qaeda communications network. Dr. Leon Hadar, a world-renowned terrorism connoisseur, who has written The Osama bin Laden I Don't Know, translated this somewhat historic document, and it was authenticated by a panel of outside veteran amateurs, including retired analysts from the Office of Strategic Services.*

IN THE NAME OF GOD, the Merciful, the Compassionate. From *Abdullah men Amreeka* (the Slave of God from America) to the honorable brother, Osama bin Laden, *Imam al-Ummah* (leader of the Islamic community). Peace and the mercy and blessings of God are upon you. *Aslam-o-Alaikum* (Hi there). *Keef Halak, Sheik?* (What's up, boss?). BTW, you looked great in your last video that I watched on television here. I especially liked the groomed beard and see that you are using the Just for Men Haircolor I sent you. So who is the lucky new bride? *Mabrook!* (Congratulations!) And apropos, let me know if you need more of the "blue."

I also hope you enjoyed the DVD with the final "Sopranos" episode that I put in the package at the last moment. I was a bit disappointed that we never got to

find out whether Muhammad and Ahmed, who Tony befriended in the last season of the show, were "brothers" or just pistachio salesmen. This subplot resulted in an AP story headlined, "Osama and the Sopranos," about alleged FBI worries over "al-Qaeda ties to the Mob." Next thing you know, the Olive Garden will be serving *Halaal* food and Rudy Giuliani will be campaigning out of the local mosque in Trenton, New Jersey, in the *Dar al-Kufr*, the land of non-Islam of North America. I know, I know. You're probably saying, "Yallah. Get out of here."

I don't know if you remember me. But we met in the Khyber Pass café in Quetta in 1999 (1420 according to the Muslim calendar), and I bombarded (oops ... sorry!) you with my schtick about dying to meet those virgins in heaven, and you looked deep into my blue eyes (Bosnian dad) and stroked my blond curly hair (German mom) and said, "Ya, *Habibi*. The bottom line is, you look less like Omar Sharif in 'Lawrence of Arabia' and more like Robert Redford in 'The Way we Were.' We need you here. To study. To become an American. Perhaps even run for office. In any case, I want you to write me regular reports about political developments. Some movie reviews. Think about yourself as al-Qaeda's own Frank Rich. Also obtain a credit card and do some shopping for me. The mole in the mall, if you will. Are you familiar with Davis' Big & Tall? I like their stuff."

So here I am with another of my monthly reports, as well as a copy of that new book by Chomsky that you requested. We are entering now into the last year of the rule of the *Rayyis* George W. Bush. I know that many of our brothers curse him as a *Fajir*, a wicked evildoer or a sinner by action. I beg to differ. If anything, he reminds me of the biblical character of Balaam. As retold by Persian historian Abi J'afar Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari, Balaam was instructed by Balak, the king of Moab, to curse the children of Israel. But then God "turned his tongue" so the cursing ended up falling upon Balaam's own people and the blessing upon the Israelites. From that perspective, Bush could be described as the Balaam of our time and we as the Israelites he cursed. Bush is certainly a *Kafir*, a sinner by disbelief in Allah. But the results of his actions advance the work of God. Bush leads the world's "only remaining superpower," the most powerful military force that the infidels have acquired since the time of the Romans. And not only has he failed to defeat us—as you know, he depicts us as "Islamofascists," the term he borrowed from that *Dahri* (atheist) and *Sakran* (drunk) from England, Christopher Hitchens. In fact, as that celebrated Catholic *Warrag* (scribe)—or to apply the Indian term used by the Americans, "pundit"—Andrew Sullivan has pointed out on his blog, Bush has become "Al Qaeda's enabler." The *Luti*

(homosexual) is right. Our group “surely never had a more helpful man in such a powerful place.”

God, indeed, has turned Bush’s tongue, and the promised crusade against the believers has been transformed into a *Jihad* against crusaders and Zionists. Bush, a *Dajjal* (liar), may have refused to embrace Islam and will die as an infidel, but through his actions, he appears to the world as though he was a brother who had received guidance from Allah. Hence, you the hawk on the top of the *Shara* (mountains) should be the proudest of all the brothers for this great accomplishment. You had succeeded in forcing this *Habllah* (idiot) from Texas and all his Zionist cowboys into the traps in the land of Mesopotamia, where the *Ummah* (nation) and its *Mujahidin* are now leading a victorious *Jihad* against the Americans and their allies. *Inshallah*.

**THANKS TO THE AMERICAN INVASION, WE HAVE ESTABLISHED OUR PRESENCE IN MESOPOTAMIA AND EXPANDED OUR REACH IN THE ENTIRE REGION AND AROUND THE WORLD, ESPECIALLY IN EUROPE.**

After seven years in the “white” house in Washington and six years after the blessed *Shaid* (martyrs) destroyed the Tower of Babylon in New York and the nest of the *Hamsah* (five) in Virginia, you are still the leader of the faithful and will remain long after Bush returns to his ranch to play with his pigs and dogs. (I FedExed to you a copy of the memoir of former Mexican President Vincente Fox in which he describes Bush as a “windshield cowboy”—a cowboy who prefers to drive—and, get this, is afraid of horses...) You will then expel the *Fasiq*, those who have violated Islamic laws, from the two Holy Precincts of Mecca and Medina, return Syria to the Islamic fold, defeat the Zionists, and pray in *Al-*

*Asqa*. Then you will ask Bush: Where are all your historians and other *Hakim* (wise men) that you told us would sing your praise years after you leave office and portray you as “Truman”? Weren’t they expected to conclude that you had “transformed” the Middle East, turning its people to the supplicants of the West and bringing its oil resources under the control of your crooked companies?

But God, the generous, benefited you, wise *Sheikh*. You will become the *Caliph* of a great *Ummah* while Bush the *Wa’lek* (boy) will probably become the *Caliph* of the owners of baseball, the game of the, yes, small balls. Isn’t it appropriate that Bush as well as Cheney—the two, as you know, cursed that they are, are *abu el-banat* (father of the girls)—like this game?

You probably recall the time when Bush, using the language of his Wild West, promised the American people to

Musharraf, who helped us and the Taliban brothers build our political and military power in Afghanistan and prepare our operations is welcomed as a Friend of America in Washington. Instead of discussing the Osama-Musharraf Connection, Bush and Cheney made it sound as though you had been allied with Saddam the *Murtaad* (apostate) and the man of *Ightala* (killing). O *Sheikh*, you actually wanted the Saudis to let you fight Saddam—which you considered worthy of death—on behalf of the *Ummah* and remove him from Kuwait. But they refused and allowed *Baba* Bush to operate out of Saudi Arabia and force the Iraqis from Kuwait and then remain in our Holy places. But *Salil* Bush and his neocons and crusaders knew that they could not sell the invasion of Iraq without making the American people believe Saddam was behind the *al Nashmi* (brave) attack in New York.

Now, thanks to the American invasion, we have established our presence in Mesopotamia and expanded our reach in the entire region and around the world, especially in Europe, the *Dar al-Amn* (part of the Western world where Muslims reside). The torture, death and destruction the Americans have inflicted on the Iraqis has only helped to recruit more brothers into the ranks of the *Mujahidin*. *Shukran!* (Thanks!) *Ya, Rayyis* Bush. You probably recall that in a report I e-mailed you before the 2004 presidential elections, I expressed hope that the American people would re-elect Bush. And they did! And they allowed this *Majnun* (madman) to become al-Qaeda’s man in Washington. *Shukran! Shukran!*

Bush and his Zionist crusaders had hoped to create the Greater State of Israel from the Euphrates to the Nile—Iraq and Syria and Palestine under their rule. But they did not understand that Iraq was a mosaic of many ethnic and



religious groups that only the *Shaytan* (Satan) Saddam kept together. So they built an alliance with the Kurdish spies in the North and with the Shi'ite snakes who, as you know, are not real Muslims. The Shi'ites betrayed us once again like the cunning people they have always been and are trying now to operate as the agents of the Americans and the Persians in Baghdad in the same way that they once joined Genghis Khan and other enemies of the Muslims. But our *mujahidin* are continuing to strike at these treacherous people and their American masters and are making sure that the "central government" in Baghdad cannot function beyond the "Green Zone," where the Americans are hiding like the cowards that they are. They are now presenting—or, to use a popular term here, "spinning"—their strategic failure in maintaining a unified Iraq as a great "success" in transferring power to the provinces or "decentralization." If you believe that, I'll buy you a bridge over the Euphrates.

As for this so-called "surge," it cannot change the constellation of forces on the ground that we helped create in the aftermath of the American invasion. "Iraq" doesn't exist anymore as a state, and its disintegration is already helping destroy the U.S. hegemonic strategy in the Middle East. You know that the Kurds want to establish their state and expand and that this is igniting opposition from the Turks, Iranians, and even the brothers in Syria. You can already see the tensions between the Americans and the Turks, who are bound to take military action against the Kurds in the North, especially if the Kurds try to win total control over Kirkuk and make life difficult for the Turkmen people in the area.

There is a lot of good news coming from Turkey: more women there are wearing the *Khumur* (scarf), and people there are choosing the *Sirat al-Mustaqim* (straight path) and returning

to the true fold of Islam. Opinion polls suggest that the people despise Bush, the Americans, and the Zionists. I remember that you predicted once that the road to the Caliphate would have to lead through Turkey—that the Americans would abandon them, that the Europeans would reject them, and that one day they would become our *Awliya* (allies). *Inshallah*.

I've forwarded to you copies of news reports and commentary from newspapers in this country like the *Washington Post* that were celebrating the election victory of the Islamists of the AK party in Turkey as another sign that "democracy is spreading in the Middle East." If you accept my Bush-as-Balaam analogy, you have no choice but to conclude that these guys who seem to believe that having free elections in Turkey, Palestine, Egypt, and else-

ducing revolutionary developments. They have helped us by weakening the foundations of the old order and sweeping away the corrupt lackeys of the Americans. We can only hope that similar changes will take place in Syria, where the *Murtaad* Bashir rules. Indeed, the Americans are doing their best to weaken him and force him to ally with the Persians. And when they try to reverse the results of free elections, which is exactly what they are doing now in Palestine, they demonstrate to the world that they are nothing more than hypocrites. We have nothing to lose. If they have free elections in Egypt, the brothers will come to power, abrogate the "peace" agreements with the Zionists, and join the struggle. If they don't have elections, the Pharaoh Mubarak would not survive the rage of the people.

**THIS SO-CALLED "SURGE" CANNOT CHANGE THE CONSTELLATION OF FORCES ON THE GROUND THAT WE HELPED CREATE IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE AMERICAN INVASION. "IRAQ" DOESN'T EXIST ANYMORE AS A STATE, AND ITS DISINTEGRATION IS ALREADY HELPING DESTROY THE U.S. HEGEMONIC STRATEGY IN THE MIDDLE EAST.**

where are going to advance their interests and help strengthen the influence of their "democracy" are actually helping create the conditions for our victory. In Turkey, in Palestine, and Egypt—or for that matter in Iraq and Lebanon—free elections strengthened the hands of those who are against America and its political model. After all, the brothers won in Palestine and gained more votes in Egypt.

And while we despise the Shi'ites and their agents in Iraq and Lebanon, who have been gaining more political power, we should rejoice at these developments, for the elections choreographed by the crusaders and Zionists are pro-

I know that during our meeting and throughout our correspondence, I may have sounded a bit hesitant, if not doubtful about our ability to achieve the long-term goal of restoring the Caliphate. "How could we do it with just a few thousand *Mujahidin* fighting against the powerful evil forces with all their huge militaries and nuclear weapons?" I once asked you. And you responded, "Through our revolutionary actions, we'll be able to force them to play according to our script, to waste their resources in trying to take control over the *Dar al-Islam*, from the mountains of the Hindu Kush to the rivers of Meso-potamia. We will make them bleed, create divisions in

their ranks, and expose the internal contradictions in their system.”

Indeed, O *Sheikh*. Who would have believed that one day Bush and his clique of neocons would compare our power to that of the Third Reich, the Japanese Empire, and the Soviet Union. That is the way they see us now. And the irony: their “war of terrorism” is taking longer than the one they fought with the Germans and the Japanese in the 1940s. They are now stuck in Iraq and in Afghanistan, with no way out. They lose if they stay, and they lose if they leave. The price of oil is rising into the stratosphere. Meanwhile, our actions helped hasten the split between the Americans and the Europeans, and the arrogance of American power is making it more likely that the Russians and the Chinese could pose a challenge to Bush and his gangs. The world now knows that the Christian crusaders and the Zionists have the same agenda: destroying the Muslim lands of Palestine and controlling *Al Quods*. And they call that the “peace process.” It is just a question of time before the rotten apples, the *Murtaad* of the Arab Gulf, Syria, of Mashriq and the Maghreb, and of Pakistan, will be smashed under our feet and a united *Ummah* will be ready to fight the Persians and rip the Shi’ite snake.

I pray to Allah that the American voters elect the Zionist minion and agent of the Vatican Giuliani as their next president and that he and his troops fall into the new traps we are preparing for them as they try to depose regimes in the *Dar al-Islam*. (Syria? Iran?) I’m certainly going to register as a volunteer in Rudy’s campaign after I mail you the DVD of the last season of “Big Love.” ■

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### **Washington’s frantic efforts to stop a Turkish incursion into northern Iraq might well be too little and too late**

because Ankara is well aware that Vice President Dick Cheney and his neoconservative allies have been deliberately blocking efforts to control Kurdish Workers’ Party (PKK) terrorists. Cheney and his associates have been orchestrating covert American support for the Party of Free Life of Kurdistan (PJAK), the Iranian Kurdish separatist group, in its operations directed against Iran. PJAK is the PKK’s sister movement, and it obtains many of its armed militants from the PKK. Cheney believes that pressuring Iran is a paramount objective and that the regional Kurdish government should ignore Turkish complaints about inaction on the terrorism problem. But the hypocritical policy is provoking a backlash within the foreign-policy community, which believes that traditional ally Turkey has been badly treated. Gen. Joseph Ralston, who was the State Department’s liaison to Turkey on the PKK issue, resigned his post early in October in protest. Ralston had repeatedly urged the regional Kurdish government in Iraq to crack down on the PKK terrorists, but he received no support from either the White House or from the Department of State.



### **Intelligence officials are becoming increasingly concerned over the changing nature of suicide bombing.**

Nearly half of all suicide attackers are now women and children, and security forces are having difficulty mounting an effective defense against them. Suicide bombing, which has become the weapon of choice for many terrorist groups, was unknown prior to 1983, when the tactic was developed by Hezbollah. It is now at record levels in Iraq, Sri Lanka, and increasingly in Afghanistan. As the objective of the attacks is to generate fear, the terrorist organizers have worked on ways to make suicide attacks less predictable and more difficult to prevent. This has unfortunately meant that women and children are increasingly being targeted as potential victims and are also being frequently employed as perpetrators. The surge in the targeting and use of children has been truly alarming, with more than 1,800 children either killed or injured in terrorist attacks in 2006, an increase of 80 percent over 2005. Teenagers from 15 to 18 years old now make up about 20 percent of all suicide bombers, and younger children are also beginning to be used, one of whom was only 8 years old. Women also constitute approximately 20 percent of attackers worldwide. Terrorism experts believe that women and then children were turned into bombers in an effort to circumvent security measures, which traditionally profiled the average bomber as a man in his twenties. Terrorists mounting more sophisticated operations have also tried to frustrate the profiling by employing foreign “volunteers” and men who are in their forties with wives and children. Men who are by their appearance identifiable as religious, either in dress or through their having beards or other outward manifestations of piety, are seldom selected. This means that there is no longer a reliable profile of what constitutes a suicide bomber.

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# Discounting Values Voters

Christian conservatives invite the candidates to ignore their demands.

By Michael Brendan Dougherty

IN AN UNCHARACTERISTICALLY nervous speech to the Values Voters Summit, Rudy Giuliani nearly flubbed his most important line: “I’ve made a commitment to decrease adoptions and increase...” He paused awkwardly then took a breath, collecting himself: “to decrease abortions and increase adoptions.”

He smiled and the audience of over 2,000 conservative activists smiled back at him, then laughed and applauded. They were warming up to him. They have to.

While the Family Research Council and their socially conservative allies designed the conference to impress upon the candidates the power of the Christian Right within the Republican coalition, the summit accomplished just the opposite. It revealed an evangelical movement that cannot reject candidates it dislikes or rally around an electable alternative. It also demonstrated that the Religious Right’s leadership lacks resolve compared to the fiscal conservatives and war hawks who dominate the Republican big tent.

In the blue glow of their laptops at the back of the ballroom, over 400 members of the media tapped on their keyboards. Giuliani’s speech came just a week after Focus on the Family’s James Dobson floated the idea of supporting a third party. It also came just hours before the Arlington Group—a coalition of Christian Right leaders—would meet to discuss which candidate they should support.

Under that pressure, and under the projected red, white, and blue stars,

Giuliani made a virtue of his disagreements with the values-voters set: “If I come out here and I take a poll and I try to figure out what you all believe, and then I just repeat to you what you all believe, then I’m a follower. With me, you’re going to always know where I stand. You will always know that I will not bend and sway with the political winds, if they conflict with what I believe is right for our nation. And I see clearly the value of people of faith in forming the political debate with their ideas and ideals.”

After those subtle jabs at Mitt Romney and Fred Thompson’s authenticity, Giuliani delivered a line for the cameras and front pages: “I come to you today ... with an open mind and an open heart, and all I ask is that you do the same. Please know this: you have absolutely nothing to fear from me.” While high-profile journalists like David Brody and Margaret Carlson declared this “the headline,” *CQ*’s Chris Lehmann provided a more accurate translation of Giuliani’s message to values voters: “I have nothing to fear from you.”

But the pressure social conservative put on Giuliani was showing results. For the first time, he promised to veto any changes to the Hyde Amendment, which prohibits federal funding for abortion. It was a small but real concession. Fr. Frank Pavone, the head of Priests for Life, declared it a “good first step and an invitation to dialogue.” But pro-lifers want more. Pavone continued, “The mayor understands that we cannot tolerate a little bit of terrorism—

a little bit of the destruction of innocent life. We also cannot tolerate a little bit of abortion.”

Family Research Council insiders maintained their smiles for the cameras after Giuliani’s speech, but privately conceded that the summit was not going as they had hoped. Joe Carter, the director of web communications for FRC and a blogger at the influential *EvangelicalOutpost.com*, admitted that the leadership had hoped Giuliani would decline their invitation to speak: “It was savvy on his part to show up.” Giuliani deftly put the onus on FRC to reject him, saying, “I’ll continue to extend my hand to you, and I hope that you’ll take it.”

Even if the Christian Right’s leadership couldn’t publicly slap Giuliani’s hand away, they hoped to grab on to a strong alternative. By giving Mitt Romney the primetime spot on Saturday night, FRC and the Arlington Group telegraphed their next move. Unfortunately for Romney, Mike Huckabee also came to the conference.

Despite his anemic third-quarter fundraising—just \$1 million in contributions—the former governor of Arkansas and Baptist preacher came fired with Biblical fervor: “I was led to believe that it was a lot better to be with David—that little shepherd boy with five smooth stones—than it was with Goliath with all his heavy armor.” The atmosphere in the ballroom changed immediately. Robert Lalka, a blogger for *Faithful Democrats*, reported getting chills as Huckabee preached. “I come today as one not who comes to you, but as one who comes



from you. You are my roots.” Standing ovations occurred after every few lines. “It’s important that people sing from their hearts and don’t merely lip-synch the lyrics to our songs. I think it’s important that the language of Zion is a mother tongue and not a recently acquired second language.” The crowd began to shout “Amen!” as they stood up and waved their hands.

Huckabee had convinced the attendees to go with their hearts. While the leadership’s preferred candidate, Romney, edged out Huckabee by a tenth of a percentage point in online voting, voters at the conference awarded the man from Hope, Arkansas five times as many votes as the Mormon with the money. The Baptist’s popularity stymied any effort of the Arlington Group to get behind Romney, lest they seem at odds with the grassroots.

## HE MAY NOT HAVE REALIZED IT, BUT BAUER WAS **DECLARING HIS OWN MOVEMENT’S IRRELEVANCE.**

By failing to reject Giuliani forcefully or rally their troops around a viable alternative, Christian conservatives are in danger of losing their power to determine the orthodoxy of the Republican Party on social issues. Allowing a pro-choice candidate to be the GOP’s presidential candidate would undo much of the work the Religious Right did to establish its importance and strength in the party in the 2004 election, when increased turnout by evangelicals was widely credited with securing Bush’s second victory.

Other factions in the GOP coalition have been able to identify their potential enemies and reject them. Within a week of the Values Voters Summit, Pat Toomey, the president and CEO of the Club for Growth, anathematized Huckabee’s deviations from the free-trade,

low-tax creed in a piece for *National Review Online*. The Club even set up a website, TaxHikeMike.com, to torpedo his chances.

Hawks, too, have put pressure on candidates who are insufficiently zealous in the support of Bush’s war on terror. After drawing criticism for their slight gestures toward foreign-policy realism, Romney and Huckabee have begun including sharp references to the “threat of Islamofacism” in their speeches. While both candidates had previously hinted at an exit strategy for Iraq, they now rattle their sabers at Iran.

Since the Religious Right’s positions on abortion and gay marriage enjoy more support in the grassroots of the GOP than free trade or the Iraq War, the only explanation for the inability of social conservatives to exercise discipline on the party is a failure of leadership.

David Kirkpatrick in a recent feature for the *New York Times Magazine*, wrote, “James C. Dobson, the founder of Focus on the Family, was poised to play kingmaker in 2008, at least in the Republican primary.” But the evangelical leader’s public statements about a potential third-party run, should Giuliani capture the nomination, have only advertised his weakness in determining the GOP’s course. Joe Carter of FRC admitted privately that Dobson, “never was a kingmaker and isn’t one now.”

The dithering of Christian Right leadership has allowed a no-hoper like Huckabee to absorb evangelical support in the early primary states. He told *Slate* after the summit, “The rank and file are no longer waiting to be given the nod by people who are perceived to be their leaders. Many are frustrated they’re not get-

ting more of a sense of leadership from the organizations they’ve supported.”

Jerry Falwell, a pioneer of the Moral Majority, has died, and his sons, Jerry Jr. and Jonathan, do not possess his political drive. Dr. James Kennedy, another pastor who helped Republicans collect three out of four white evangelical votes in the last presidential election has died. Dobson himself is soon to retire from his public ministry.

And even if the evangelical movement recruits a fresh generation of leaders, it is becoming less monolithically Republican. The president’s approval rating among white evangelicals has fallen to below 45 percent from over 90 according to the Pew Research Center. As Kirkpatrick reported in the *Times*, “white evangelical identification with the Republican Party has dipped below 50 percent, with the sharpest falloff again among the young.”

Just outside the ballroom after Giuliani’s speech, a scrum of Washington reporters gathered around the diminutive former FRC president Gary Bauer, thrusting their tape recorders into his face. Bauer explained, “There is not one person [in the field of candidates] who is head and shoulders above everybody else.” Then he firmly announced that the various leaders would be released to support whomever they like best. “We all have our own view, and we are doing the best we can under somewhat challenging circumstances.”

He may not have realized it, but Bauer was declaring his own movement’s irrelevance: the Christian Right would not exercise decisive influence in the Republican primary.

But that’s not what values voters came to hear. Back in the ballroom, yet another invited speaker told the audience that they were winning the long battle, that they were taking back America. Clapping and cheering, they still believed. ■

# Pakistan's It Girl

Can Benazir Bhutto hold her country together?

By Eric S. Margolis

IT TOOK ONE suicide bombing in Karachi to undermine the short-lived political marriage of convenience that Washington engineered between Pakistan's embattled president, Pervez Musharraf, and former prime minister, Benazir Bhutto.

The Musharraf government immediately blamed the usual Islamic suspects for the deadly explosions that greeted Bhutto's long awaited return to Pakistan from self-imposed exile. At least 139 people died, and hundreds were injured in the Oct. 18 attack on her cortege. Two days later, however, Bhutto told me her security advisers were convinced high-ranking security officials of the Musharraf regime were behind the attack. So much for the honeymoon in Pakistan.

The military-dominated government of President-General Musharraf, as he styles himself, has run onto the rocks. The general, who came to power after overthrowing then Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in a 1999 coup, is deeply unpopular in all sectors of Pakistani society, save the tiny, pro-Western wealthy elite. He has held on to power for the past eight years by rigging elections, packing the national and state assemblies with yes-men, using courts to punish critics, muzzling Pakistan's once feisty media, and silencing opponents by bribery or arrest.

So far, Pakistan's highly disciplined armed forces have remained loyal to Musharraf. The military establishment is the only national institution that still commands public respect and has not been engulfed by corruption. But there is growing unrest as Musharraf increas-

ingly accedes to U.S. pressure to use Pakistan's soldiers to battle pro-Taliban Pashtun tribesmen in Northwest Frontier Province and Baluchistan. Both important provinces are now in a state of rebellion against Islamabad. Musharraf is being accused by growing numbers of Pakistanis of being a "puppet of Washington" and waging war against his own people at America's command.

Alarmed that the most important ally in President Bush's war on terror was foundering, the administration sought to shore up his rule through a backroom deal with Bhutto, Pakistan's most popular politician. A series of outstanding criminal corruption charges against her were dropped, and she was permitted to return home supposedly free from prosecution in exchange for her agreement to some sort of power-sharing pact with the military junta. But Pakistan's increasingly independent-minded Supreme Court vowed to review this unseemly arrangement.

I asked Benazir Bhutto during an afternoon we recently spent together in London how could she make such a tawdry deal with the man she had so long denounced as a usurper, dictator, and enemy of his own people? Bhutto's answer: she will reinstate democracy and it will eventually replace military rule and defeat spreading Islamic extremism.

Not good enough, I challenged her. Such a deal would sully her reputation, damage her cause, and expose her to charges of crass political opportunism. She shrugged off my concerns with her mantra: "democracy is the answer to Pakistan's problems."

But what kind of democracy? That of Thomas Jefferson or George W. Bush? When Bhutto was prime minister, she complained that the military was excluding her from all national security issues and foreign policy. She used to scold me—an admirer of Pakistan's military—"There you go again, Eric, you and your beloved Pak generals..." The generals, in turn, and the religious leaders, too, despised Bhutto, and dismissed her as "that girl." She ended up controlling only about a quarter of the government.

If Bhutto becomes prime minister for a third time, to paraphrase Stalin's famous quip about the Vatican, how many divisions will she have? Even if Musharraf relinquishes his position as commander of the armed forces, as he promised, his hand-picked military allies—all vetted and pre-approved by the Pentagon and CIA, according to my Washington sources—will control the military's command structure. Last March, senior Indian intelligence sources told me that Washington had already selected Pakistan's next chief of staff of the armed forces—and possible future leader—Gen. Ashfaq Kayani. They were right.

With Musharraf and his generals retaining complete control of military, intelligence, foreign affairs, financial, security, and cash-flow from Washington, what will be left for reincarnated Prime Minister Bhutto? Education, public sanitation, receiving visiting bigwigs? This is the kind of ersatz democracy the Bush administration supports in Egypt, Morocco, Algeria, Palestine, Jordan, and Turkey, where a junta of reactionary generals runs a state within the state.

Benazir thinks she will succeed in leveraging Musharraf and his henchmen from power by using her huge public appeal. But she failed twice before to do this. What will make her third time lucky, particularly since Musharraf plainly intends to use her for democratic window dressing to appease critics in the U.S. Congress and at home? "I won't be used," Bhutto insists, but I'm not so sure. She is a courageous, resourceful lady, but Musharraf and his allies hold almost all the levers of power—except, of course, public support.

Bhutto must also contend with widely believed accusations of past corruption, though she insists they were all politically motivated. Furthermore, she is dogged by charges she is "Washington's woman," a tool of U.S. policy in Pakistan. Critics also accuse her of being too Westernized and anti-Islamic. Her frequent diatribes against Pakistan's Islamists, tribesmen, and the Taliban, aimed at currying favor in Washington, have reinforced the view she is a carpet-bagger. By contrast, the leader of India's Congress Party, Italian-born Sonia Gandhi, has successfully become more Indian than the Indians.

While Musharraf and Bhutto glare at one another like two scorpions in a bottle, Pakistan continues to slide toward the abyss. The war in Afghanistan now pits Western forces against much of the Pashtun tribal people who straddle the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. It is bleeding into Pakistan, enlarging the conflict for already strained U.S. and NATO forces and raising the risk of American combat operations in Pakistan, a nation of 165 million whose tough armed forces number 550,000. Musharraf's use of Pakistan's army against insurgents in the federal tribal areas—a blatant violation of Pakistan's constitution—is causing national outrage. "Musharraf, fight India for Kashmir, not your own people," screamed the Urdu press—until gagged.

Musharraf has escaped numerous assassination attempts. His foes, whose number is legion, will continue gunning for him. An attempted military coup was already crushed earlier this year, thanks to warnings from the CIA and NSA. More are certain to follow.

Pakistan used to be one of the world's most pro-American nations. No longer. A shocking World Public Opinion poll found 73 percent of Pakistanis believe the Bush administration is set on "weakening and dividing Islam." Even higher results came from Egypt, Indonesia, and Morocco. Most Pakistanis call Osama bin Laden a hero.

Musharraf now resembles the late Shah of Iran and Egypt's Anwar Sadat: key American allies lauded in the West but reviled at home as traitors. The Bush administration has until now put all its strategic eggs in Musharraf's basket, but a bomb or coup could end the general's rule and plunge Pakistan into chaos. General Kiyani and other senior officers would, of course, take over, but what if a power struggle ensued or the army and powerful intelligence service, ISI, split between pro-U.S. senior officers and younger nationalist ones? Who would then control Pakistan's nuclear arsenal? Washington clearly sees Benazir Bhutto as an insurance policy.

Pakistan, created in 1947, is a brittle nation, rent by sharp regional, ethnic and religious differences. A secessionist movement calling for union of the Pashtun tribes of Afghanistan and Pakistan into a new state, Pashtunistan, or independence movements in Baluchistan or Sind, would tear apart the nation and invite intervention by nuclear-armed India, just as it invaded rebellious East Pakistan in 1970.

Musharraf and Bhutto are riding a tiger. Pakistan is facing potential civil war, growing urban violence, and more assassination attempts against key leaders. This is the house of cards upon

which the Bush administration built its South Asian policy. If Pakistan implodes, the communications and supplies of U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan will be severely endangered, and Pakistan could emerge as a new Iran, seething with hatred for the West. What is today a hotbed of Islamic extremists could become an arsenal for international *jihad*.

While the Bush administration, and even Laura Bush, were loudly blasting Burma's nasty military junta as repressive and anti-democratic, the U.S. was quietly providing Pakistan's military junta—which has killed over 3,000 citizens, jailed thousands without due process, torturing many, and rigged elections—with a reported \$1 billion in monthly aid, not including secret CIA stipends to key politicians and generals.

Into this maelstrom steps Benazir Bhutto. Whether she will be Pakistan's desperately needed Joan of Arc or "that girl" sent by Washington remains to be seen. Musharraf will try to isolate and marginalize her. The roles of former PM Nawaz Sharif, and the Supreme Court, remain wild cards.

The best chance for stabilizing Pakistan and averting a major crisis there is to hold honest, democratic elections in which Bhutto, Nawaz Sharif, and Musharraf vie for office. Instead, Washington continues to abet military rule heedless of the fact that the primary cause, and main target, of the violent Islamic extremism we call "terrorism" is not the West but the Muslim world's U.S.-backed dictatorial regimes.

Only one thing is sure: the next administration in Washington is going to inherit not only the debacle in Iraq but an exceptionally confusing, unpredictable, and dangerous crisis in Pakistan. ■

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# Past the Peak

The signs were there, but Americans drove right by.

By James Howard Kunstler

IN SO FAR as it epitomizes everything that is grotesquely out of whack with American living arrangements, Houston was the perfect place for the big “peak oil” conference of the year. The 500 or so attending—geologists, oil industry execs, economists, academics, alt. fuel freaks, and freelance journalists like myself—were marooned for four days in a convention center Hilton, in a district devoid of the least urban amenity, amid a wasteland of surface parking. You couldn’t buy a stick of gum within a mile of the hotel and venturing out on foot in the 90-degree heat would have been like re-enacting the Bataan Death March. The pharaonic grandiosity of the convention center next door—the size of three aircraft carriers and resembling one architecturally—was a baleful reminder of the floundering leviathan that government has become in the face of a crisis like peak oil.

As it happened, representatives of government and the mainstream media were conspicuously absent from this conference devoted to the crucial resource needed to run places like Houston—and, incidentally, industrial civilization. Clearly, the nation is having a hard time paying attention to its energy predicament.

My own theory as to why this is so goes something like this: having poured our collective wealth into an infrastructure for daily life based on incessant motoring—suburbia and all its accessories—we have become hostages to a pernicious psychology of previous

investment. We cannot face the awful fact that our way of life really has no future in the coming age of energy scarcities. Thus there is little coherent public conversation about it. This leaves those working on peak-oil issues consigned unfairly to the intellectual margins—with Sasquatch hunters and UFO abductees—while the nation ignores a wide range of ominous signals and parties on.

For those who have been distracted by the mainstream news diet headlining Britney Spears and the toilet communication techniques of Sen. Larry Craig, a *précis* on peak oil may be in order. Peak oil is shorthand for the geologic fact that oil is a finite resource and that credible signs indicate we have passed the world’s all-time oil production high point, with rather dire implications for how we live. Viewed through an admittedly short-range rearview mirror, the numbers suggest that July 2006 was the peak, at just over 86 million barrels a day (m/b/d). Since then, world production has fallen to the 84 m/b/d range. Meanwhile, world demand has risen to about 86 m/b/d and is widely predicted to reach 88 m/b/d next year. In short, the demand line has now crossed the production line, and the trend is almost certain to continue—with potential for oscillation as economies wobble in response to high oil prices and regional scarcities.

Crucial to understanding the peak-oil problem is that it is not strictly about the world running out of oil. It is about what happens as the world slides down the

slippery slope of depletion. There will always be oil. But quite a bit of it will never be extracted for one reason or another—unfavorable geography, deep water, armed conflict. The quality of the world’s oil supply is already trending firmly away from once abundant light-and-sweet crudes to the leftover heavy-and-sour crudes, which are harder to refine and yield less gasoline. All these pieces of the plot are subject additionally to “above-the-ground” geopolitical factors that will determine who gets how much of whatever is left.

I hasten to add that peak-oil theory—indeed oil geology itself—contradicts the popular wishful idea that the earth contains a creamy nougat center of oil that is continuously replenishing old fields. This is just not consistent with reality, and the broad circulation of the fantasy is a symptom of our desperation and cluelessness. In fact, much of the world’s production has relied on a handful of “super-giant” fields, such as Ghawar in Saudi Arabia and Cantarell in Mexico, which account for about 60 percent of their countries’ total production. There is absolutely no evidence that the super-giants—which also include China’s Daqing and Kuwait’s Burgan—are being replenished. They are playing out largely because the latest and greatest technology for oil recovery has had the paradoxical effect of draining the existing fields more efficiently. The same is true of the North Sea and Alaska’s Prudhoe Bay. It is also important to know that worldwide discovery of oil



peaked back in the 1960s and has been in such steep decline lately that that we are now offsetting only a tiny fraction of yearly depletion.

As the oil runs out, the complex systems we depend on for daily life are certain to falter and, in many cases, fail. By complex systems, I mean, for instance, the way we produce food for the world's groaning population—relying heavily on oil-and-gas-based fertilizers and pesticides. The list would also include our Big Box mode of commerce, our cars-and-airplanes-only system of transportation, our suburban land-development habits, and our highly centralized secondary school systems utterly dependent on the yellow bus fleets. The finance system is especially susceptible to disruption, since one implication of peak oil is that industrial economies will cease to grow, and the investment paper that represents the expectation of growth will lose its credibility. Of course, the oil markets themselves are a complex system subject to severe disturbance in a post-peak situation of remorseless decline. Instability in any and all of these systems is certain to amplify the failures in the others. One way or another, these failures point ineluctably to a picture of long-term economic contraction, hardship, and political trouble. And despite the sedulous wishing now underway, all reality-based evidence suggests that alternative energy sources will not come close to mitigating our problems with fossil fuels. The public will be gravely disappointed by what things like biofuels, solar, and wind can actually do for us.

The opening speaker at the Houston conference was Robert Hirsch, co-author of the now-famous 2005 report commissioned by the U.S. Department of Energy that, much to the chagrin of the DOE, first told the nation in no uncertain terms that we were heading

for a potentially lethal set of disruptions in daily life due to our complacency about oil. Hirsch goes further now, two years on. He reminded the audience that the major private oil companies like Exxon-Mobil, BP, and Shell now account for a mere 5 percent of world production—"the old majors are the new babies"—and that the rest is controlled by national oil companies like Saudi Aramco, Mexico's Pemex, and Russia's Kremlin-controlled operations. This, Hirsch said, portends a new era of "resource nationalism" that will starkly alter the way oil is allocated to the importing nations. He predicted a future of "oil export withholding," panicked markets, and allocation disturbances that would make the 1973 OPEC embargo look like a golden age.

Matthew Simmons, America's leading oil industry investment banker, didn't have better news. He asserted that the U.S. is so woefully unprepared that at the first precipitating market upset, the nation is liable to fall into a deadly pattern of "hoarding behavior," a kind of "bank run on oil stockpiles," as he put it, which would lead to crippling scarcities as well as much higher prices. The likely outcome would be strict oil and gasoline rationing, which in and of itself would not mitigate the attending hardships. Simmons also reminded the crowd that the equipment now used throughout the oil industry—from drilling rigs to refineries to pipelines—is so uniformly old and decrepit that the oil business could collapse from that problem alone. He went even further and wondered aloud whether we had enough raw resources in iron and copper to rebuild the critical pieces of this system.

And the hits kept coming. Dallas geologist Jeffrey Brown revealed that something previously unrecognized is going on in the oil markets: export rates are dropping more steeply than sheer production decline rates. That is, not only

are the exporting nations getting less oil out of the ground, but they are sending an ever decreasing amount of that oil out to world markets, in part because they were using substantially more of their own declining production. The latest numbers show these export rates are dropping so quickly that within five years, the world's total export capacity could be half what it is now. To complicate matters, these conditions vary from one exporting country to another. Mexico's depletion rate, for instance, is so steep because of its dying Cantarell field that it could easily go from being America's number-two source of oil imports (after Canada and before Saudi Arabia) to being completely unable to send us any oil in five years. Now, with America currently importing over two-thirds of all the oil we use, imagine the implications.

These were the highlights, but there were plenty of other things to chew on—the fate of the airline industry (grim), the condition of the U.S. passenger rail system (laughable), the value of the ethanol boom (called "tragic" by Hirsch), the developing picture of scarcities among a range of metals and other resources crucial to industry (dire), and the supernatural indifference of the press and our political leaders to all of these very serious problems.

It was a sublime coincidence of fate and history that throughout the conference, the price of oil surged up through the high-\$80 range and briefly touched \$90 a barrel on Oct. 19. This only underscored the absence of the mainstream media and the inanity of the ongoing debates between the characters who are running for president, none of whom has ever publicly uttered the phrase "peak oil." ■

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*James Howard Kunstler is the author of The Long Emergency and other books.*

# California Schemin'

Don't like losing elections? Change the rules.

By Steven Greenhut

LET'S SAY YOU'RE A diehard GOP activist and you realize that the Republican Party has become irrelevant in the nation's most populous state, so much so that the GOP candidate—any GOP presidential candidate—has no chance of winning the state's 55 electoral votes in your lifetime. How do you put the state's electoral votes in play in time for November 2008, thus sparing the nation a Hillary Clinton presidency?

Well, you rig the election rules, as proponents of one recent initiative are trying to do. The idea is to change California from a state that awards its electoral votes on a winner-takes-all basis to one that hands them out proportionally. The proponents' main goal is to scrape up another 20 electoral votes for the Republican candidate, which—given the closeness of recent elections—could be the difference between President Hillary and President Rudy (although many of us find either prospect equally distasteful).

This being California, there's always an opportunity to bypass the Legislature and take your pet issue directly to the people, provided you've got enough dough to collect 434,000 valid signatures and then to run campaign ads in the nation's costliest media markets. Changing the electoral system—a complex issue that would face stiff Democratic resistance—is a long-shot, but Republicans in California are used to having nothing in their playbook other than the Hail Mary pass.

These plays usually fail. On Sept. 28, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that the initiative was in shambles after its author

and a top consultant quit. "Despite having [Gov. Arnold] Schwarzenegger's former political lawyer, Tom Hiltachk, and his fundraising consultant, Marty Wilson, the effort had raised only about \$200,000, most of it from a shadowy group seemingly based in Missouri that won't say where the money came from," wrote Bill Bradley in his political blog, *New West Notes*. The two men resigned after the donor, the hastily formed "Take Initiative America" committee, refused to disclose the real source of the donation.

A few days later, the media reported that the source of the only substantial donation made to the initiative was Paul Singer, the billionaire hedge-fund executive and fundraiser for Republican Rudy Giuliani. Democrats went on the offensive, bringing in Clinton-era consultant Chris Lehane, who filed a complaint with the Federal Election Commission and started pounding Republicans for their dirty tricks. "This puts this money-laundering operation right inside the Giuliani campaign ... with Rudy's top donor and his closest confidants," Lehane told the *San Francisco Chronicle* in September. "Federal election law is clear. If you're a presidential candidate, you or your agents can't direct money to a campaign that impacts the presidential campaign ... and there's no better way to rig the campaign than to impact the Electoral College system."

On Oct. 23, however, a group of prominent Republicans, including Sacramento consultant Dave Gilliard and GOP strategist Ed Rollins, announced that they were reviving the effort and would spend

whatever is needed to get the initiative on the June ballot. They haven't identified any big new donors, although the *Sacramento Bee* and a statewide blog reported that recall financier, U.S. Congressman Darrell Issa, is behind it. The new effort has only until Nov. 13 to gather about 550,000 signatures. (The campaign already has 100,000 signatures and a total of 650,000 are needed to get enough valid ones, according to a *Los Angeles Times* report. Count me as skeptical.)

It's rather telling that such a potentially significant initiative drive has received so little support. Perhaps most Republican donors have accepted the coming Hillary presidency or this plan is too much of a self-serving scam, even by the low standards in California, where the initiative process has become a means for well-heeled interest groups to tap into the public treasury, as happened with the \$3-billion stem-cell initiative passed in 2004.

Former Republican Party Chairman Shawn Steel published an Oct. 2 opinion piece on a conservative blog that was clear about its intent: "What could be more important than electing a Republican to the White House in 2008? ... Our friend, attorney Tom Hiltachk submitted an initiative proposal that absolutely rocks the Democrats. Squeals could be heard ranging from Howard Dean to every California Democrat elected official, crying about everything from disenfranchisement to 'stealing' elections. Everyone understands if proportional voting is legal in California in 2008, Democrats will not win the White House."

Presidents don't win by nationwide popular vote, but instead are awarded electoral votes based on the popular vote in each state. Whoever wins 270 electoral votes wins the presidency. In 48 states, all the electoral votes go to the winner of the state. In Maine and Nebraska, however, the winner of the overall popular vote gets two electoral votes, and the remaining votes are handed out to the winner from each congressional district. Such a proportional system hasn't mattered: the candidate who has won the popular vote in each of those states has always won every congressional district. Even if the votes were divided, the small number at stake—four for Maine, five for Nebraska—would rarely swing an election.

But California is enormous, and while the state has a right to hand out electoral votes as it chooses, a change would have dramatic effect. The state's congressional districts have been gerrymandered so that almost every district is either overwhelmingly Republican or overwhelmingly Democratic. Of California's 53 congressional seats, 19 are held by Republicans, which means that under a Nebraska or Maine-like system, the Republican candidate would be almost certain to win at least 19 electoral votes, even if the Democrat beats the Republican by the same 1.2-million vote margin that John Kerry beat George W. Bush in 2004.

If the initiative does somehow gather steam, consultants will have to craft a nonpartisan message, a necessity given that this Democratic-dominant state would be unlikely to approve a partisan Republican initiative. As Hendrik Hertzberg explained in an August *New Yorker* article, proponents would have to argue that it's unfair to award all of a state's electors to one party since all of the state's voters didn't vote for that party. Yet it's hard to make that argument. If all states embraced this reform,

the net result would be the same: "[C]ongressional districts are as gerrymandered as human ingenuity and computer power can make them," Hertzberg wrote. "The electoral-vote in 90 percent of the country would still be a foregone conclusion, no matter how close the race." In other words, there's no fairness to be gained from any shift in the system. The only purpose is to change the rules of the game in favor of Republicans in California. (Democrats in North Carolina have considered the same thing for the same reasons.) That's a much harder sell.

Ironically, the most prominent voice against the measure comes from Republican Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, who told ABC News: "To me, what we have in place right now works. I feel like if you all of a sudden in the middle of the game start changing the rules it's kind of odd, it almost feels like a loser's mentality, saying I cannot win with those rules, so let me change the rules."

Those words are ironic because Governor Schwarzenegger is the poster child for Republican Party Hail Mary passes. Back in 2003, the state was reeling under the administration of Democrat Gray Davis, a moderate Democrat who panicked during a deregulation-driven energy crisis. He did nothing as the state faced rolling blackouts, and he did little as deficit predictions climbed to \$38 billion. Meanwhile, soaring workers' compensation costs were spurring businesses to leave for other states. Conservative activists began a successful recall campaign, over the skepticism of the GOP establishment.

Once the recall gained steam, most Republicans backed the Schwarzenegger novelty candidacy instead of the true fiscal conservative campaign, that of state Sen. Tom McClintock. Arnold the actor did a good job of talking about free markets and braying about his devotion to Milton Friedman. He

even made a passable Chamber of Commerce-type governor in his first year, vetoing all of the so-called "job-killer" bills. But after voters rejected his slate of conservative-leaning reform initiatives during a special election, the governor abandoned his efforts to "blow up the boxes" of the state's bureaucracy and swung hard to the left, showing himself beholden to no principle beyond his own popularity. He embraced enormous spending programs and even universal health care, sending state spending soaring from about \$100 billion to more than \$130 billion. The huge deficit has shrunk, but only because of the governor's reckless borrowing. Now, even mainstream conservatives are asking why anyone even bothered with the recall.

It serves the party right. For a variety of reasons, the California Republican Party has been reduced to gimmicks, ranging from celebrity candidates to this iffy plan. Republicans who say this initiative will succeed are as believable as those who argued that once Gov. Gray Davis was recalled from office, Schwarzenegger would usher in an era of limited government and renewed Republican electoral hopes. For a dose of gumption, our "post-partisan" governor keeps offering his advice to the party: move to the middle. By that, he means that Republicans ought to abandon even the pretense of standing firm against government taxing, spending, and regulatory programs.

He is right, however, about the Electoral College initiative, which indeed reflects a "loser's mentality." But when you are perennial losers, what other mentality can one have? There are no easy answers here, just the latest evidence of what happens when a major party no longer connects with voters. ■

*Steven Greenhut is a columnist for the Orange County Register.*

# Arts & Letters

## FILM

[Michael Clayton]

### The Fixer Is In

By Steve Sailer

LAST YEAR, “NBC Nightly News” edited a segment to make it appear that I was debating George Clooney over whether moviegoers were interested in his social conscience. As an admittedly biased observer of the dispute, I’d say that Clooney’s roguish charm absolutely crushed my tiresome logic.

Now Clooney’s anti-corporate thriller “Michael Clayton” is one of the best-reviewed films of the year, with critics ecstatically comparing it to their favorite anti-establishment films of the 1970s. And indeed, it is competently made. Yet it has generated little excitement at the box office.

“Michael Clayton” illustrates how dull even natural stars like Clooney and intelligent filmmakers like Tony Gilroy (moving up to direct after writing the “Bourne” trilogy) can be when they set out to make “serious” (self-important) and “political” (leftist) movies. “Michael Clayton” is a domestic “Syriana,” the morose 2005 film about an evil oil company that won Clooney an Academy Award for growing a beard and putting on 30 pounds. (Hey, I did that years before George even thought of it.)

In “Michael Clayton,” Clooney plays a Queens-born lawyer with a Fordham degree working at a top Manhattan cor-

porate law firm otherwise staffed by WASP and Jewish Ivy Leaguers. They won’t make him a partner because he’s outclassed intellectually, but when high finance turns tabloid, only he, a former prosecutor with a brother in the NYPD, can tap the municipal “favor bank.” When a CEO client hits a jogger with his Jaguar and runs off, Clooney/Clayton is brought in as the fixer.

The screenplay, though, fails to exploit the intriguing ethnic angles. Rather, it churns out the same old plot about a murderous multinational rubbing out whomever gets in its carcinogenic way.

Tilda Swinton, so aristocratic and androgynous that she makes Cate Blanchett look like Angelina Jolie, plays the corporate counsel for UNorth, which peddles its cancer-causing herbicide in 62 countries. She pays Clooney’s law firm tens of millions to fight weed-killer lawsuits, but then their lead defense attorney goes all Howard Beale of “Network,” stripping naked while ranting during a deposition about how working for UNorth has put blood on his hands

This sounds entertaining, but isn’t because auteur Gilroy ignores even the ripest targets for satire, such as the plaintiffs’ contingency-fee attorneys, always a colorful subspecies (*Homo avaricious vulgaris*). Instead, he maintains a steady tone of doleful indignation.

Our common law doesn’t work well with cases in which blame can only be assigned statistically. Say the defendant’s herbicide raises the chance of cancer by 50 percent. So one out of three customers who get cancer are victims of the company, while two out of three aren’t. But science can’t tell which is which. The contingency-fee attorneys bring suits from everybody who might

have been harmed, while the defense tries to insinuate to the jury that the plaintiff deserved to get cancer. It’s an ugly but fascinating slice of modern Americana but not one you’ll hear anything about from the one-sided “Michael Clayton.”

Clooney’s fixer has to get the litigator back on his manic-depression medicines so the firm can stiff some more widows and orphans for UNorth. This plunges him into a dark night of the soul, which Clooney portrays by moping around sullenly for two hours. Can somebody please tell George that he’s not an actor—he’s a movie star? If I want to see somebody looking tired, ineffectual, and beaten down by life, well, I’ve got a mirror.

Then Swinton calls in an executive-outcomes firm to murder Wilkinson before the renegade defense attorney spills UNorth’s secrets. Next, she has a bomb placed in Clooney’s car.

Swinton can play over-the-top villains such as the White Witch in “Narnia” and an Archangel Gabriel in league with his former colleague Lucifer in “Constantine.” Here, though, she realistically embodies a common type, the lady lawyer whose biological clock is barely ticking. She’s fine at it, but the authenticity of her performance combined with the absurdity of Gilroy’s plot wrecks the movie because corporate yuppettes don’t kill people.

Only at the very end does Clooney finally turn on the charisma, and that’s just to point out the stupidity of the storyline. He explains to Tilda Swinton that he’s having her arrested because, “I’m not the guy you kill. I’m the guy you buy off.” Good point, George, but it’s a little late to be bringing it up... ■

Rated R for language.



## BOOKS

[*Heroic Conservatism: Why Republicans Need to Embrace America's Ideals*, Michael J. Gerson, HarperOne, 292 pages]

# The Gospel According to Gerson

By Kara Hopkins

IF YOU RECOGNIZE Michael Gerson's name, it's because he wasn't very good at his job. The second task of a speechwriter is to make an ineloquent boss sound like he's channeling Cicero in his own accent. The first is to disappear.

But Gerson isn't one for the wings. The profile writers' darling wasn't content to script a president; he wanted to shape policy—and claim credit. In the opening scene of his new book, *Heroic Conservatism*, Gerson recalls a November 2002 Oval Office meeting about a plan to spend \$15 billion to fight AIDS in Africa—"the largest health initiative to combat a single disease in history." Predictably, the money men were opposed, but then the president asked his scribe's opinion. "If we can do this, and we don't," Gerson recalls himself saying, "it will be a source of shame." *U.S. News & World Report*—the speechwriter's former employer charitably declined to name its source—published Bush's reply: "That's Gerson being Gerson."

Gerson being Gerson gushes on about the "humanitarian conspiracy": "I saw one of the high points of political idealism in modern history: an American president, out of moral and religious motivations, pledging billions to save the lives of non-citizens. ... here was the living, dancing evidence of what ambitious moral, effective government can accomplish."

His book is an ode to that grand vision, as unencumbered by modesty as the author's White House tenure was. It bids to couple Christianity and conservatism in the service of great good, but in so doing diminishes both.

Gerson seems an unlikely hero: describing Bush, he writes, "He was athletic, outgoing, likeable—I was none of these things." He acknowledges "a certain seriousness and moral intensity," "debilitating shyness," and discomfort with small talk—traits well-suited to the writer's garret but ill-fit for a revolutionary.

He's also an unlikely conservative: his earliest political experience was representing Jimmy Carter in a high school debate, and, when asked by the *New Yorker* to name his favorite president, he praised FDR, Truman, Kennedy, and Wilson before mentioning Reagan—"to some extent."

But that is what heroic conservatism is about: moral fervor meets global ambition. Perhaps the former senses its prickliness—its tendency to joyless parochialism—and longs to widen its confines. The latter may perceive instability in its enthusiasm and want a tether. Together they make a potent pair—and a dangerous one.

Gerson goes on:

I am convinced that the bold use of government to serve human rights and dignity is not only a good thing, but a necessary thing. I believe the security of our country depends on idealism abroad—the promotion of liberty and hope as the alternatives to hatred and bitterness. I believe the unity of our country depends on idealism at home—a determination to care for the weak and vulnerable, and to heal racial divisions by the expansion of opportunity.

It's easy to see how from the same expansive pen flowed presidential promises to "end tyranny," "spread freedom," and "break the reign of hatred."

Discerning a conservative pedigree is more difficult, for the defining instincts of the Old Right—its preference for

particular community, its caution against chasing utopia, its keen sense of the limits of politics—don't cloud his vision. Not that Gerson is deterred. He avows, as if the saying makes it so, "I am a conservative," even offering a Burkean rationale that would pass muster with most keepers of the flame: "because I believe in the accumulated wisdom of humanity—a kind of democracy that gives a vote to the dead—expressed in the institutions and moral ideals we inherit from the past." But then he takes a decidedly radical turn, for the "moral ideals" Gerson has in mind—"liberty, tolerance, and equality"—echo the Jacobins' own, and our pact appears to be with every inhabitant of the planet. "Our nation cherishes freedom, but we do not own it," he wrote in a text Bush delivered from the deck of the *USS Ronald Reagan*. "While it is the birthright of every American, it is also the equal promise of the religious believer in Southern Sudan, or an Iraqi farmer in the Tigris Valley, or of a child born in China today."

Thus the villains in Gerson's morality play aren't liberals, for whom government programs are only improved by global scope, but realists. He condemns them for "offer[ing] no millennial goal to pursue in foreign policy—neither international order, nor democratic peace." But he sees their stock falling. With the zeal of a man who has found his moment, he exults, "After the shock of 9/11, the Republican Party—the party of realism and caution—had become the party of idealism, action, and risk."

Those wild tendencies allowed the war on terror its global reach, but it was Gerson's brush that simultaneously made it a study in black and white. The worst of worlds combined. Where the exercise of force should have been constrained, we got a crusade, unchecked by just-war dictates or historical implausibility. And where the shadowland of conflicting interests and ancient grievance should have been afforded wide estate, we drew rigid dichotomy instead.

Where Bush begins and Gerson ends is unclear—and inconsequential. They share the same lens.

In describing the president, Gerson notes his "obsession with discipline and self-mastery." That's characteristic of someone determined to keep addictive demons at bay. It's also common among a certain kind of convert—one who views Christianity as a moral code designed to make bad men behave.

Many a Puritan pulpit has reinforced that notion, but it isn't a redemptive construct—the essence of the Christian faith. As the German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer argued, the Edenic temptation—to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil—was not doing evil, the antidote to which would be doing good, but usurpation of the Providential prerogative to discern between the two. Thus the Christ of the New Testament healed on the Sabbath—in apparent violation of Mosaic law—to illustrate what Bonhoeffer called the Gospel's "outrageous demand": that Christian ethics move beyond the claim to know and enforce absolute good and evil. He wrote, "The Law empowers sin, not just because it causes the evil in us to be revealed, but also because it spawns self-righteous 'good.'" To be merely good is to align oneself with conscience alone—an impoverished stand-in for divine initiative.

But this is precisely the goal Gerson intends—at least for his movement: "Traditional conservatism has a piece missing," he writes, "a piece shaped like conscience." With that installed—"compassionate conservatism" in Bushian shorthand—the administration could claim a perverse divine right to judge whole nations. Democracy and human rights become substitute salvation. Thus the war on terror could be sold in the most moral terms: "We will rid the war of this evil." The original text of what may stand as Bush's most famous phrase designated Iran, Iraq, and North Korea a fairly forgettable "axis of hatred," but Gerson substituted "evil" for, the *New Yorker* reported, "its more theological resonance."

Shortly after Gerson began scripting Bush, reporters noticed Biblical phrases creeping into the presidential rhetoric

and wrote, with cryptologist's glee, that Bush was sending coded messages to his Christian base. The truth was more perverse. As Presbyterian minister Fritz Ritsch noted, when Bush alluded to the hymn "There's Power in the Blood" in a State of the Union text, he spoke of the "wonder-working power" not of the "precious blood of the Lamb" but of "the goodness and idealism and faith of the American people"—the world's substitute saviors. Similarly, the president referred to the U.S. as "the light of the world," which the "darkness" has been unable to put out—a clear invocation of John 1:1-5. As evangelical pastor Gregory Boyd pointed out, "In this paradigm, what applies to Jesus ('the light of the world') can be applied to our country, and what applies to Satan ('the darkness') can be applied to whomever resists our country. *We* are of God; *they* are of the Devil. *We* are the light; *they* are the darkness. Our wars are therefore 'holy' wars. With all due respect, this is blatant idolatry."

Fired by the same false gospel, Gerson now offers a sequel: with evil on the run, we must turn our attention to discerning and doing good.

After hearing Bush's messianic Second Inaugural Address, Peggy Noonan reminded, "This is not heaven. It's earth." But having assigned his country responsibility for judging the world's evil, Gerson must lay its redemption on America's shoulders.

Far from burdening, the prospect cheers him. Gerson's formative spiritual experience, as he describes it, has a mirthless quality: "I was raised in Presbyterian churches that held to a cold but serious Calvinism, more focused on intellectual rigor than emotional expression or liturgical beauty. I suspect that all these traditions have left their impact. Religion was taken seriously in our home..."

By contrast, his do-good gospel—that "living, dancing evidence of what ambitious moral, effective government can accomplish"—animates his noble impulses and elevates his prose. Bonhoeffer called this "joyous

secularism"—the snare of "Christians who view the role of government as helping God to establish the Kingdom of God on Earth."

That isn't to say that social justice isn't a Christian concern. But Gerson is more stirred by abolitionists and activists like William Wilberforce and Martin Luther King Jr., and the sweeping social change they wrought, than he is by Christ's own model, which was conspicuously short on political impact and long on individual acts of mercy. He implies that his giants—poverty, AIDS, illiteracy, genocide—are too big for hand-to-hand combat. Thus the Biblical call to "do unto the least of these"—the hallmark of which is personal sacrifice—must be replaced by government programs—the wellspring of which is coercion. If this constitutes an act of worship, it honors a failed god.

"Compassionate conservative" has become a kind of epithet—with good cause. But Michael Gerson is a man moved by suffering. He surveys the world and sees "a drowning humanity." He's grieved by oppression, angered by injustice, and captures his frustration with enviable fluency. But in casting for an outsized champion—indeed the Almighty himself has been weighed and found wanting: "these are not unfortunate facts of history," Gerson writes, "they are violations of God's intended order"—the Heroic Conservative forgets that his political and spiritual creeds privilege the quiet and reward the meek. There's a reason Russell Kirk called for "prudent restraints upon power and human passions." We see but through a glass darkly.

The rubble of our heroic mission to democratize the Middle East stands testament to the power of unintended consequences. But Gerson cannot see it as ruin. The same hubris that drove America to rid the world of evil now stalks this equally abstract drive to do good—and the best intentions don't diminish the blowback inherent in any global scheme.

"Show me a hero," F. Scott Fitzgerald said, "and I'll write you a tragedy." ■

[*Black Mass: Apocalyptic Religion and the Death of Utopia*, by John Gray; Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 229 pages]

## Getting Lost on Utopia Highway

By R.J. Stove

TO PRAISE A WRITER on American foreign affairs for being adult might seem a backhanded compliment but for the obvious puerility of so much written in this field. Mark Steyn, David Frum, and Michael Ledeen are not necessarily the names that first spring to mind in considerations of serious reasoning for grown-ups. It does credit to John Gray, London School of Economics professor and regular *New York Review of Books* contributor, that he takes political dogmas seriously and, above all, is not constantly engaged in screaming down his opponents.

While Gray's main preoccupation in his new book, *Black Mass: Apocalyptic Religion and the Death of Utopia*, is the Iraq imbroglio, in its American and (more unusually) its British aspects, he avoids—as his title and subtitle make obvious—the entire “what one apparatchik told another apparatchik” method illustrated by, for instance, Bob Woodward's *Plan of Attack* and James Mann's *Rise of the Vulcans*. Nor is his principle interest geostrategic scrutiny. He concerns himself, instead, with the history and prehistory of the fantasizing that has animated the Bush-Blair imperium: how it arose and how it laid successful siege to otherwise rational minds.

As a concise blocker-in of intellectual backgrounds, Gray warrants, at his best, being likened to Isaiah Berlin, although in accordance with his subject, his overall picture is darker. He owes much (maybe too much) to the surveys of Norman Cohn, the British chronicler of

demonology who died only weeks before Gray's book arrived in the mail. Nevertheless, Gray admits the crucial distinction, which Cohn blurs, between even the most crackpot of medieval Christian millenarians—such as Joachim of Fiore in the 12th century—and their modern counterparts. Whereas the former, as Gray notes, “believed that only God could remake the world, modern revolutionaries imagined it could be reshaped by humanity alone.”

Forming a bridge between medieval and modern apocalyptic lunacies stands Gray's account of life—if life it can be called—in the proto-Jacobin, proto-Marxist, proto-*Playboy* city-state ruled during the 1530s by John of Leyden, who devised a new calendar, abolished private ownership, and implemented polygamy. This supplies some comic relief, an element not otherwise conspicuous in this volume, though it does crop up again on page 42. It seems that Stalin thought New Soviet Man might be created by way of New Soviet Primate. Yes, in Uncle Joe's Georgia, women were officially impregnated with ape sperm. (Goodness knows whether these pregnancies resulted in live births, but if they did, that would explain lots about journalism.)

When dealing with comparatively recent times, Gray asks the simple and resonant question: “How did Utopia—once found mainly on the Left—come to power through the Right?” Some notion of Gray's expository gifts may be gathered from the fact that he even makes Leo Strauss intelligible, a feat usually conceded to have been beyond Leo Strauss himself. (Dwight Macdonald's verdict on Alger Hiss describes Strauss admirably: “The cuttlefish can take lessons from our author in how to obscure an issue.”) It is hard to withhold a certain perverse admiration for a guru who attained as cultic a following as Strauss did without having bothered to elucidate what his own religious views were or if he held any such views at all. Gray avoids over-easy identification of Strauss with neocons—after all, Strauss

never imagined that Zanzibar could be forcibly democratized by next Tuesday at the latest—but the common ground between them remains. Both Straussianism and neoconservatism appeal primarily, in 2007, to those whose desire to be In The Know outweighs any piffling loyalty to sane traditions. Moreover, both offer the specific charms of a world where the plebs can be fobbed off with mere surface meanings while the Big Kahunas feast on Gnostic fantasies of their own creation: fantasies in which Plato's *Republic* somehow becomes an attack on utopianism and Baghdad becomes as law-abiding as Burlington, Vermont.

Gray is just as lucid on writers who, unlike Strauss, condescend to intelligibility. Locke, Voltaire, and such “Counter-Enlightenment” (Berlin's term) figures as Joseph de Maistre and J.G. Herder all get considered. (A passage of Maistre's serves as Gray's chilling epigraph: “This is an abyss into which it is better not to look.” / “My friend, we are not free not to look.”) He devotes particular attention to F.A. Hayek, which is perhaps a polite way of saying that he tars and feathers him. Hayek furnished, in his *Constitution of Liberty*, a vaguely social Darwinist explanation for British institutions' survival. “Unfortunately it was as a theorist of the free market that Hayek achieved influence. ... As an account of the emergence of the free market [his explanation] is the opposite of the truth. ... Reinventing the market meant curbing spontaneously evolved institutions, such as trade unions and monopolistic corporations. This could be done only by a highly centralized state.” Michael Oakeshott famously, but not famously enough, said of Hayek's worldview: “A plan to resist all planning may be better than its opposite, but it belongs to the same style of politics.” As Gray aphoristically comments: “The free market became a religion only when its basis in religion was denied.”

The situation is worse still when we consider Thatcherism's gulf between statist reality and capitalist rhetoric.

Government spending swelled as much between 1979 and 1990 as it had done during any of the preceding 30 years. The National Health Service, better known for its nurture of death-dealing maniacs like Harold Shipman than for anything describable as care, continued to balloon. In Northern Ireland, the very pretense of cost cutting found no favor: one citizen in three was a bureaucrat, and useless industries were propped up by *dirigiste* funds with a gusto that would have left Erich Honecker agape. Readers of Peter Hitchens's reports will long since have realized how completely Thatcherism echoed left-liberalism on social issues, being as pro-abortion, pro-immigration, and anti-capital punishment as any hip pagan could desire. Whether this fact derived from active moral turpitude or, more probably, from the Tories' mere

failure to discern that a culture war existed, others must judge.

From Thatcherism to Blairism is but a step, one acknowledged by Gray himself. "The incessant 'modernization' [Blair] demanded was, in effect, an ossified version of the ideas of the late '80s. Like Thatcher ... Blair lacked skepticism. For him the clichés of the hour have always been eternal verities." Hence his imperviousness, apropos the Middle East, to arguments expounded by John Paul II and Benedict XVI, both popes being handicapped by some expertise in Augustinian and Thomistic just-war theory. "The audience [with John Paul in 2003] must have pained Blair, but it failed to shake his sense of rectitude," Gray writes. "It was enough that he felt he was right."

Blair is in abundant, if not good, company. As with the techno-utopians quoted with horrified fascination by Andrew Keen in his recent book *The Cult of the Amateur*, so with the politico-utopians quoted here: it is hard to believe that anyone actually uttered such tripe, but believe it we must. When, in September 2002, Bush announced, "Our responsibility to history is clear: to ... rid the world of evil"—a project still unfulfilled a mere two millennia after the Sermon on the Mount—we have to accept it as a seriously intended credo. When dispensationalist theocons maintain that the Old Testament, if properly understood, assigns the universe's ultimate redemptive roles to Bush and to Likudniks, they are not acting out a satirical "Simpsons" script—they mean what they say. Ditto Blair's messianic assurances that "success is the only exit strategy I am prepared to consider." Gray, citing Raymond Aron, offers a brilliant comparison between Blairism and 1930s Stalinism, wherein comparatively minor lying by the show trials' victims (Nikolai Bukharin et al. confessing to nonexistent "Trotskyist-fascist" crimes, and so on) could not, and did not, shake the prevailing devotion to a higher millenarian truth. Blair, as Gray notes with pardonable *Schadenfreude*,

"constructed a pseudo-reality that aimed to shape the way we think ... out of power he faces decades on the lecture circuit dispensing uplifting platitudes to listless audiences drawn from the second division of American business." At least Stalin's average NKVD head-kicker could enliven his grunts by occasional allusions to Spartacus's revolt. For Blair and Bush, "the history of the past two decades [was] the only history they knew." Oh yes, and 1938.

For anyone who has the inestimable good fortune not to be in Iraq, the crucial question with Bush is to what extent his compatriots, especially after the 2006 midterm elections, share his dumbed-down fundamentalism. The assumption—particularly prevalent in Europe—of Americans' foaming religious fervor might well be overdue for skeptical analysis, based as it now is on two things: Americans' willingness to talk about God and their willingness to attend church. (How much might churchgoing derive from the loneliness and anomie of car-obsessed suburbia, factors that make any form of avowable regular socializing attractive?) A 2002 *Newsweek* poll that Gray mentions found that almost half of respondents considered America "a secular nation." Today, even in the Bible Belt, believers in the continued existence of Christ would probably be outnumbered by believers in the continued existence of Elvis. If (as could be argued) Gray overestimates Christian enthusiasm in America, he might underestimate it in parts of modern England, which appear well on the way to growing as Pentecostalized—and as incurably imitative of U.S. Pentecostal models—as Guatemala or Brazil. Yet none of this invalidates Gray's main point: that in being able to call on the Christian Right at home, Bush has had a weapon unavailable to Blair or, currently, to Gordon Brown. (The latter's father, it may be worth noting, was an old-style Presbyterian clergyman.)

This reviewer being an agnostic on matters environmental, it is not within his competence to assess properly the numerous passages in Gray's last section

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that deal with “peak oil” and broader crises. It does seem improbable, not to mention insane, that Joe Sixpack can continue partying on cheap petroleum as if it were still 1962—shades of Carlyle’s formulation, “Soul extinct; stomach well alive”—but then the apocalypse does have a habit of not actually happening quite yet. Only a generation ago, the Club of Rome assured us that overpopulation would bring famine in its train from Scarsdale to Singapore. A decade previously, Americans took imminent nuclear annihilation so much for granted that Tom Lehrer wrote a bestselling song about it, one that present-day ethnic sensibilities would render unrecordable:

*We will all go together when we  
go,  
Every Hottentot and every  
Eskimo.  
When the air becomes uranious,  
We will all go simultaneous.  
Yes, we all will go together when  
we go.*

Meanwhile, Gray scornfully refers to the “cartoon science of creationism.” Why, when this science prevailed always and everywhere until the early 19th century and the likes of Charles Lyell? It could well be that disgust at theocons has led Gray to assume that anything they utter must be false. So coarse-minded a dismissal blunts the effectiveness of his whole conclusion. And it cheapens a tome which, despite its profuse typographical errors—Norman “Podoretz,” “Dostoyesky,” and “Rheinhold” Niebuhr—is worth anyone’s study. If only he had ended it with the noble words he uses on page 192: “Preserving the hard-won restraints of civilization is less exciting than throwing them away in order to achieve impossible ideals. Barbarism has a certain charm, particularly when it comes clothed in virtue.” ■

*R.J. Stove lives in Melbourne, Australia, and is the author of The Unsleppng Eye: Secret Police and Their Victims.*

[*Micronations: The Lonely Planet Guide to Home-Made Nations*, John Ryan, George Dunford, and Simon Sellars, Lonely Planet, 156 pages]

## Big Ideas Need Small Places

By Jesse Walker

*The patriot never under any circumstances boasts of the largeness of his country, but always, and of necessity, boasts of the smallness of it.*

—G.K. Chesterton

*You can't be a real country unless you have a beer and an airline—it helps if you have some kind of a football team, or some nuclear weapons, but at the very least you need a beer.*

—Frank Zappa

THE DESERT REPUBLIC of Molossia doesn't appear on many maps, and it doesn't have a seat in the United Nations. But if you drive about 18 miles northeast from Carson City, Nevada, you'll find it. It's not right there on the highway—you need to take a left at Lafond Avenue. Then there's another left at Wagon Wheel Way, and then you take a right on Mary Lane. “The Republic of Molossia is at number 226, just up on the right,” report the authors of *Micronations: The Lonely Planet Guide to Home-Made Nations*. “Make sure they're expecting you; don't just show up.”

Molossia has been independent since 1977, though it did not settle into its current location until the mid-'90s. It has a navy (an inflatable raft), a national observatory (a telescope), and a currency; the latter, called the Valora, is “pegged to the value of Pillsbury Cookie Dough.” With a total population of four, it's unable to field its own baseball team, so instead it focuses on broomball, a local sport that “can appear very similar to field hockey.” The republic also has its own time zone: according to the country's official website, Molossian Standard Time “is 39 minutes ahead of Pacific Standard Time, or if

you prefer, 21 minutes behind Mountain Standard Time.”

Molossia is a micronation: a homebrewed jurisdiction that doesn't qualify for statehood by most conventional measurements, but still proudly insists on its independence. To these small statelets, Vatican City is uncomfortably large and Liechtenstein is a leviathan. They're a familiar feature in fiction and film: the independent borough in G.K. Chesterton's *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*—the London district that stumbles into a temporary sovereignty in the comedy *Passport to Pimlico*—and the modern-medieval Duchy of Grand Fenwick in *The Mouse That Roared* and its sequels.

In real life—or, at least, that mode of life that isn't as fictional as a novel—micronations fall into three rough categories. There are the places that actually achieved a somewhat sovereign status, at least until a larger neighbor invaded or the head of state found another way to occupy his time. There are quiet backyard countries like Molossia, which may lay claim to territory but don't do anything that might aggravate the empires that surround them. And there are entirely virtual nations—a humorless grump might call them imaginary—that don't exist outside a pamphlet or a website.

The classic guide to such societies is Erwin Strauss's 1979 book, *How to Start Your Own Country: How You Can Profit from the Decline of the Nation State*. Since the '90s, several websites have built on Strauss's work; the best of them is James L. Erwin's *Footnotes to History* at [buckyogi.com/footnotes](http://buckyogi.com/footnotes). In 2005, the Scottish comedian Danny Wallace hosted a BBC miniseries about micronations, also called *How to Start Your Own Country*; it ended with the creation of the kingdom of Lovely, located in Wallace's apartment. (From his declaration of independence: “Please do get in touch if there are any legal ramifications to what I'm doing, or if you have any problems with it whatsoever. If you don't ring, I'll just assume everything's a-okay and proceed as planned.”) Now the Lonely Planet series has published a travel guide devoted entirely to these DIY polities.

The book, written primarily by the Australian journalist John Ryan, has a slightly different focus than its predecessors. Erwin is more interested in curious bits of history than in curious pieces of the present. Other websites tend to be focused on purely virtual nations, often because they're run by the webmaster-kings of such countries. Strauss's chief interest is those people making a genuine attempt to free themselves from the megastate by establishing a minstate—or, in some cases, a proprietary operation that does not pretend to be a state at all. (He devotes several pages to casino ships and offshore pirate radio stations.) Strauss also offers a surprisingly extensive discussion of micronational defense—or maybe it isn't so surprising since he also wrote a book called *Basement Nukes*.

Lonely Planet, by contrast, deals mainly with charming, tongue-in-cheek projects like Molossia. There are a few purely virtual countries here, but in general, it doesn't make sense to give space in a travel guide to places you can only visit with an Internet connection. There are a few "real" countries as well, but again, not too many. There is Sealand, a decommissioned sea fort in the North Sea that has been ruled and defended by Prince Paddy Roy Bates since 1967. There is Christiania, a hippie squatter district in Denmark—sorry, *adjacent* to Denmark—that has maintained its autonomy since 1971. (Officially, Christiania is anarchist, so it might be inaccurate to describe it as a state. But a friend who has visited the place tells me that in practice it's run by a benign oligarchy of drug dealers, so anarchist might not be the best label for it either.) And there are the Knights of Malta, who used to control a rather large swath of territory, but today hold just two buildings in Rome. They have diplomatic relations with 98 other countries, and Italy recognizes their sovereign status, so who am I to argue?

But most of the micronations here are less ambitious about asserting their autonomy. Instead, we have entities such as the mobile Copeman Empire (territory: a trailer), the tourist-friendly kingdom of Romkerhall (territory: a

hotel), and the libertarian principality of Freedonia (territory: none, but they're looking). "Many find it a rewarding hobby to run a model railroad, or operate model airplanes," Strauss wrote in his 1979 book. "These model enterprises have all the trappings of the real thing, in miniature. Similarly, it's possible to run a 'model country.' You need only declare your home to be an independent nation, and proceed from there."

The patron saint of such projects is Joshua Norton I, the San Francisco eccentric who in 1859 declared himself the emperor of the United States. He issued his own currency, which local businesses honored; he made royal proclamations, which the local newspapers printed; according to legend, he once managed to stop an anti-Chinese riot merely by standing in front of the mob and reciting the Lord's Prayer. I can't endorse all of his policies—the fines he levied on anyone he overheard calling the city "Frisco" were an unconscionable interference with freedom of speech—but his reign was altogether far less bloody than that of his two rival emperors in the east, Abraham Lincoln and Jefferson Davis. When he died in 1880, tens of thousands of people attended his royal funeral.

Norton managed to live as an emperor through the exercise of sheer personality and is thus an inspiration to modern micronationalists. The Republic of Molossia includes a Norton Park, named for his imperial majesty, and a panel of microleaders recognizes their peers with the annual Norton Awards for Micronational Excellence and Achievement. Lonely Planet honors him appropriately with his own entry in the guide.

I did notice two factual errors in the book. A sidebar mentions a handful of western counties that voted in 1992 to secede from Kansas and start a state of their own; the authors misconstrued this as an attempt to leave the U.S. entirely, suggesting that the Australian authors might not grasp all the nuances of American politics. Similarly, the introduction includes a throwaway reference to the Branch Davidians of Waco as "a secessionist cult." Since when did the Davidi-

ans intend to secede from anything larger than the Davidian Seventh Day Adventists? I think the writer confused them with the Freemen of Justus Township, Montana, who really did declare themselves sovereign before the FBI arrived and arrested them in June 1996.

Still, the book is entertaining reading, and despite such minor errors, I assume it would be useful as an actual guide as well, if you ever decide to take a whirlwind tour of the world's micronations. Indeed, looking through it, I see I may have already been to as many as three of the countries listed. There is the State of NSK, an art project linked to the Slovenian band Laibach. It doesn't claim any actual territory, but I saw Laibach play a few years back, and it's possible I accidentally entered the state in the course of the concert. There is also the Maritime Republic of Eastport, located right over the bridge from Annapolis, Maryland. It apparently declared independence on Super Bowl Sunday, 1998, and marks its autonomy with an annual game of tug-of-war against the neighboring town. I've visited it at least once without ever noticing that I was touching the sweet soil of freedom.

And there are the Knights of Malta, with their two sovereign buildings in Rome. I stopped in a few years ago with my then-fiancée, now-wife, while we toured Italy—it wasn't far out of our way, and I'd always been curious about the place. The knights gamely opened their gates and allowed us to enter the parking area, where we spent a few minutes snapping pictures of each other.

I suppose it doesn't sound very exciting to hang around taking photos next to a bunch of cars. But I was living the dream. I was standing on a sovereign parking lot. If you've done that once, it's hard to restrain yourself from doing it again. Next time I'm in Nevada, I'll have to swing by the Republic of Molossia. Don't worry, I'll call ahead. ■

*Jesse Walker is managing editor of Reason magazine and author of Rebels on the Air: An Alternative History of Radio in America.*

# The Schwarzenegger Doctrine

News item, Oct. 27, 2007—Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger today spoke of the arsonists who set killer brushfire blazes in California: “We will hunt down the

people that are responsible for that.” In addition, Schwarzenegger expressed special thanks to President George W. Bush for “being such a tremendous partner.”

Future news item, c. 2008—In a major policy shift, Governor Schwarzenegger today announced that he was no longer actively pursuing the arsonists, believed hiding in Nevada, who had devastated California last year and caused billions of dollars in damage. “I know I pledged to ‘terminate’ those arsonists, but now we have new priorities. History summons us in a different direction. Our intelligence experts have identified even greater arson threats to California, as well as to our friends and neighbors. So now we must act immediately against grave and gathering threats, which could be launched at any time by remorseless pyromaniacs who hate us for no reason.”

Schwarzenegger, who early in his gubernatorial career seemed uncomfortable with soaring rhetoric, is now confidently using lofty language to describe the enemies of the Golden State. In particular, he has identified three states—Kansas, Nebraska, and Vermont—which form, he says, the “axis of ignition,” guilty of “state-sponsored pyromania.” Now, he continues, this axis poses an even greater danger than last year’s arsonists. And the danger could grow worse: “If these state-sponsors could gain access to WMC (“weapons of mass conflagration”), the fires of October 2007 would look, by comparison, like backyard barbeques.”

In the past, Schwarzenegger had warned, “Those who could become arsonists in the future are as bad as those who committed arson in the past.” More recently, the governor’s

Sacramento-based “brain trust” enunciated a new policy agenda, which some dub “The Schwarzenegger Doctrine,” calling for “pre-emption” of fire-starting state governments across the U.S.

But Schwarzenegger insists that low-level enforcement efforts will continue in Nevada, where Golden State police agents are working with local authorities to apprehend suspected arsonist cells within in the Silver State. However, most analysts believe that the leading arsonists have fled even further, into the badlands of Utah. But Schwarzenegger dismisses any continuing danger from the 2007 arsonists, wherever they might be: “We have those arsonists on the run; they are ineffective, hiding in canyons. The real danger, now, comes from the ‘axis of ignition.’”

In particular, Schwarzenegger has singled out Kansas, led by Democratic Gov. Kathleen Sebelius. Schwarzenegger, a Republican, told reporters, “The weapons of mass conflagration that we know she is hiding could cause enormous damage in California.” Reminded that Sebelius says she does not possess such weapons, Schwarzenegger shot back: “OK, let her *prove* that she is not hiding WMC in Kansas.”

Schwarzenegger refuses to negotiate directly with Sebelius, but he has been persuaded to work with the National Governors Association (NGA), issuing demands to the Sunflower State—demands that neutral analysts equate to full surrender. And yet as those NGA negotiations drag on, Schwarzenegger says, “Time is running out.”

The California governor is believed to be preparing a pre-emptive strike against WMC sites in Kansas, with or

without the NGA. Schwarzenegger is developing a “coalition of the willing”—including Indiana, Rhode Island, and Delaware—as allies in possible joint action against Kansas.

However, Schwarzenegger denies that any action is imminent. “Violence is our last resort.” But, he adds, “While I have no war plans on my desk, nothing is off the table.” He continues, “Kansans have just as much right to live their lives free from fire as Californians.”

Some have expressed concern about Schwarzenegger’s policy, fearing possible chaos in the Sunflower State. But Schwarzenegger dismisses those worries—“We are planning carefully for every possibility”—reminding Californians of the stakes as he sees them: “If you saw what I saw, the fires burning from Malibu to San Diego, you would understand the need to take this fight to the enemy. We will make Kansas the central front in our war against fire—not that I have made any final decision about Operation Kansas Freedom.”

In fact, some Schwarzenegger advisers speak grandly of a “Greater Midwest Initiative” to transform fire-usage across Middle America.

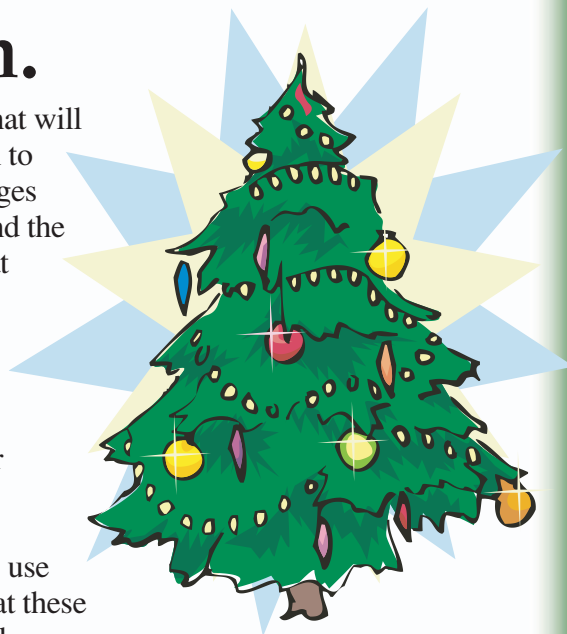
In other late-breaking developments, Schwarzenegger denied reports that he was building a secret prison site for suspected arsonists in Humboldt County. “That’s nonsense. We have all the prison space we need now that we have reopened Alcatraz and can give arson suspects the punishment—I mean, fair trials—that they deserve.”

Meanwhile, the Schwarzenegger administration brushes off reports of infiltration into California from Mexico. “There’s no danger to the south,” said a spokesman, “only folks coming across the border who need our help. Compassion does not stop at the Salton Sea.” The adviser added, “The governor is looking east, laser-like, to the real threat—Kansas.” ■

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